

# **African urban high school girls' constructions of sexuality and sexual risk**

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**December 2013**

## **Statement**

**As the candidate's supervisor I agree / do not agree to the submission of this dissertation.**

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## Declaration

I, Nirvasha Rugburthial declare that:

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## **Dedication**

My parents Mr Pithamraj and Mrs Hemarajee Rugburthial, I dedicate this to you both. You are the reason today that I'm a young educated and independent woman. I value your inspiration and unconditional love. To my dad, your perseverance and continuous motivation have enabled me to strive for success and to be the best I can be. To my mum, I thank you for your tolerance and patience throughout my study and for duly fulfilling the role of mother and mother in law so whole heartedly. You have truly been my pillar of strength throughout my study.

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated how a group of African high school girls attending an urban high school construct their sexual identities and how their particular constructions are related to their engagement in risky sexual behaviours. This particular study formed part of a larger project entitled: 16 Turning 17: Young people, gender and sexuality in the context of AIDS. This qualitative study brings together the various ways in which a group of young African girls construct their sexuality. This study recognizes how the construction of sexuality is negotiated, understood and enacted. It has created a platform for these young girls to voice their perceptions, understandings, behaviours and experiences that influence their sexualities.

A social constructionist perspective was used to understand how these young African girls construct themselves and others as sexual subjects and how social processes and actions feed their understandings of sexuality and in the engagement in sexual risk. The findings in the study illustrate both the ways in which male power operates to police and regulate young female sexualities as well as the ways in which this group of girls develop resistance against gender power and exercise a certain degree of sexual agency. The findings suggest the variegated perceptions of sexuality and sexual risk highlighting these young African girls' ability both to endure and to challenge the constraining gender norms and roles that society has embedded in their context.

The study offers recommendations for school curricula to be structured in a manner that raises awareness about sexuality and encourages safe sex practices. This study recommends that learner awareness not only be raised in subjects such as Life Sciences and Life Orientation but through involvement in awareness campaigns, through workshops and through organised youth networks. Within the different grades at school such awareness-raising should highlight aspects of HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, teen pregnancy, safe and unsafe sex practices etc. Such measures would assist young people with an opportunity to interact and learn with their peers about sensitive topics. Peer groups and networks formed at school or through community efforts are proposed that would increase young people's confidence levels. For example, young homosexual girls are encouraged to form peer groups that this could offer each other emotional support and build resistance against others who discriminate against homosexuality.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the study**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study investigated how a group of African high school girls attending an urban high school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa construct their sexual identities and how their particular constructions are related to their engagement in risky sexual behaviours. This particular study forms part of a larger project entitled: 16 Turning 17: Young people, gender and sexuality in the context of AIDS. This qualitative study brings together the various ways a group of young African girls construct their sexuality. This study recognizes how the construction of sexuality is negotiated, understood and enacted.

This study brings about an analysis of the diverse and contrasting ways in which a group of young African high school girls construct their sexuality. This study argues that young African girls are moving away from being docile victims of male sexual power, resisting such power over them, taking control, exercising their human rights and taking control of their sexualities. This study offers insight as to how young girls – despite the vulnerability, sexual risk, cultural practices, and gender norms and so on still – are able to navigate their sexualities as well as take a positive step towards creating safe sexual spaces. In this study we come across the relative acceptance of same-sex desires and relationships, hence are challenging heteronormativity. In addition this study demonstrates the considerable sexual agency young African girls are attaining in their sexual lives and the ways in which they are working towards agency in relationships.

### **1.2 Rationale**

Research on human sexuality is integral to the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS. Despite the acute awareness of the spread of HIV, both men and women continue to engage in unsafe sex practices (Boyce et al., 2007). Boyce et al. (2007) propose that sexuality should be given a more prominent position in strategies to prevent HIV infection as the epidemic raises issues of the

theorization of gender and the understanding of sexual subjectivity, sexual decision making and sexual behaviour and culture. They argue further that placing sexuality at the forefront of the epidemic enhances more effective prevention strategies (Boyce et al., 2007). Giving sexuality a more prominent position, Boyce et al (2007, pp. 4-25) argue, means talking about sex more explicitly and in a manner that is cogent and meaningful, and means understanding that sexuality is constituted socially, morally, culturally and in legal contexts and that sexuality is intrinsically linked to power and knowledge. Similarly this study provided young African girls in a South African urban high school the opportunity to express their perceptions, concerns, anxieties and pleasures around their sexual identities.

In a recent special report (UNAIDS, 2013, pp. 30-31) it is stated that every minute, a young woman is newly infected with HIV. As a result of their lower economic and socio-cultural status in many countries, women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, the centre of the global epidemic, almost 60% of all people living with HIV are women. It is with these statistics in mind that this study turns to this group of young African women in a high school to offer them an opportunity to talk about their perceptions, views, behaviours and experiences around their sexual identities.

Moreover, research has indicated the heightened vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection as compared to men and boys (Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Researchers have suggested that one of the reasons women and girls face the heightened risk of HIV infection is the double standards around sexual practices and behaviours (Banerjee & Sharma, 2007). Banerjee and Sharma (2007) further elaborate that cultural and traditional practices typically involve unequal power relations between men and women, boys and girls. Within the South African context, research has reported that women and girls face the likelihood of contracting infection due to other factors such as multiple partners being condoned in the case of men, early sexual experiences that occur through violent or coercive sexual practices, the pervasive male dominance that exists over negotiation of sex and the common occurrence of transactional relationships (Pettifor et al., 2004, pp. 1996-1997). This study acknowledges that African girls are often portrayed in ways that emphasise victimhood and vulnerability. More recently studies show both vulnerabilities and agency in the ways that African women negotiate

their sexual identities (Moletsane, 2009; Jewkes & Morrell, 2011; Mudaly, 2012). Likewise this study illuminates the diverse sexualities that exist within a South African context.

Although there is a growing interest in this area, there is still very little research on young peoples' sexualities. There remains a paucity of studies done with young girls, especially within the area of sexualities. Similarly, Moletsane et al. (2009, pp. 2-5) have drawn attention to the shortage of studies dealing with issues that affect girls in Southern Africa. They further elaborate that research has mainly focused on women and girls in victim positions as well as men and boys as the oppressors (Moletsane et al., 2009). Moletsane et al. (2009, pp. 2-5) in addition argue that research should open up a critical space that strongly advocates possibilities for the disrupting of oppressive cycles and that, furthermore, argues that girls' sexuality should benefit themselves and not be constructed in relation to male sexuality and pleasure (Moletsane et al., 2009). Similarly this study brings such a perspective to the perceptions, understanding, behaviours and experiences of these young girls' sexuality.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives**

Moletsane et al. (2009, pp. 2-5) argue that girls' lives as lived in the region are far from homogenous. This study offers a glimpse into these young girls lives and explores how the constructions of sexuality are formed in a particular group of young high school African girls. This study in addition explores how these young girls' sexual identities and constructions are related to their engagement (or not) in risky sexual behaviour. Furthermore, this study highlights the perceptions of sexual risk amongst young African girls. This study attempted to give these young girls a voice to express and talk about their sexualities through conversing with familiar fellow participants. Khau (2003, p. 30) asserts that issues of sexuality remain taboo in many African communities, with girlhood sexuality being a highly policed domain. This creates a lot of challenges as girls negotiate the spaces between being a girl-child and being a sexual being. Lastly this research attempted to contribute to the phenomenon around young people's sexuality and understanding why young people, and in this instance, young African women, engage in risky sexual behaviours despite their awareness of the detrimental consequences it has for their

well-being. Moreover, this study aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge around young sexualities and risk with specific reference to African girls.

In addition to the burgeoning literature around sexuality and risky sexual practices, my personal motivation for conducting this study arose after I completed a study on teenage pregnancy and became aware of how young girls in particular are at risk of HIV/ AIDS. I took a keen interest in exploring and gaining insight into young girls' understandings of sex and sexuality. In addition, the high number of teenage pregnancies and young mothers present at the school where I conducted my study drew to my attention the ongoing unsafe sexual practices and the effects of such early pregnancies, including HIV infection and other STIs. After engaging both local and international literature during my study on teenage pregnancy it was evident that both young men and women are at risk of contracting HIV and ultimately these detrimental effects have a profound consequence on their ability to complete their schooling. Finally through this study I anticipated that it would enable me to understand why these young girls continue to engage in unsafe sex despite the awareness campaigns that they are being bombarded with.

## **1.4 Research questions**

This research study explored the constructions of sexuality in young African girls attending an urban high school as well as how these particular constructions are related to their risky engagement in risky sexual behaviour. This qualitative study focused on the following questions:

- What do these young African women regard as risky sexual behaviour?
- What kinds of risky sexual behaviours do these young women engage in?
- How do these young African women construct their sexual identities?

## **1.5 The research site**

The research site chosen for this qualitative study was an urban, co-educational, English medium high school that serves the nearby township and surrounding community. The research

site is situated in a mixed class (working and middle class), urban area with a predominantly African population. The area that the research site is situated in is home also to Indian and Coloured residents but with a relatively low occupancy of Indian and Coloured. The school population also includes Indian and Coloured learners. In the methodology section I explain why a sample of African learners only was selected. As an observer and being an ex-learner at this school I have observed that large numbers of African learners are plagued by socio-economic issues such as poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, and gender-based violence. Moreover these African learners come from mainly single-parent homes or reside with grandparents or relatives. During my experience as a learner at this high school, educators and other stake holders would constantly hold assembly talks, have motivational talks and inter-class debates in a bid to highlight the importance of preventing HIV infection. Despite all these initiatives and attempts to create awareness around the scourge of unsafe sexual practices and HIV, on occasion learners would be found on school premises engaging in sexual activity. During my final examination in Grade 12, there were six pregnant girls in my class, two of whom did not write their examinations as they had given birth to their babies. Advocating safe sex practices and delaying first sex are key tools in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS.

## **1.6 The structure of the study**

This dissertation consists of the following sections:

Chapter 1: Introduction – This section comprises the background to my study, the rationale for my study, the aims and objectives of the study, research site and key research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework – This section draws on local and international literature on sexuality, gender, HIV/AIDS, women and vulnerabilities, gender power, transactional sex, peer pressure, sexual risk and agency. It highlights work of various scholars and their findings that are relevant to my study. An account of the theory of social constructionism by theorist Vivian Burr and an elaboration of his theory follow. Burr's theory of social constructionism presents a perspective that enables me to understand how these young

African girls in this study construct themselves and others as sexual subjects and how social processes and actions feed their understandings of and engagement in sexual risk. This perspective draws attention to the multiple realities and hence multiple sexual identities, rejecting a homogenous sexuality.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology – This section discusses and describes the detailed plan and account of how my study was executed and the strategies employed to complete the study. This section discusses how a qualitative study within an interpretivist paradigm is implemented. The data collection process, which involves in-depth semi structured and open-ended interviewing, is presented and the necessary measures and tools adhered to in the data collection process are described. The ethics adhered to during the process of this study are elaborated together with the description as to how data was codified and thematically arranged in preparation for data analysis and interpretation. In addition I discuss the challenges and limitations of this research study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion – This section reports the findings derived from the data collected and a detailed discussion follows. At the outset of this chapter biographies of the participants are illustrated, including information that shows the variegated lifestyles and the backgrounds these young African girls come from. An analysis of the data is presented following the theoretical framework adopted by this study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations: The conclusion provides a summary of my study, focusing on the main findings derived from this research study and drawing on the conclusions this study has yielded. The chapter concludes with possible ways forward, based on the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the related literature on studies of sexualities and focuses specifically on young peoples` constructions of sexuality. Both local and international sources have been gleaned to provide a comprehensive review of scholarship in the field of sexuality studies.

This study in particular seeks to understand how young African women at a high school situated in an urban area construct their sexual identities. I have drawn on essential literature that emphasizes the key aspects that impact on the manner in which young people give meaning to their sexual identities. I draw from various authors who have offered definitions of sexuality to provide a working definition of sexuality [ies], and address these issues:

- Defining sexuality
- Gender and sexuality: African girlhood
- African women, sexual vulnerability and HIV/AIDS
- Gender power, sexuality and sexual risk
- Gender, culture and sexuality
- Young women and sexual agency
- Gender, sexuality and sexual coercion
- Early sexual debut
- Peer pressure, sexuality and sexual risk
- Knowledge on sexuality
- Young women: Intergenerational sex and transactional sex
- Condom use by young people: An issue of [un] safe sex
- Risky sex, love and trust
- The role of schools and parents in disseminating information on sex and sexuality



## **2.2 Defining sexuality**

Often sexuality is equated to or is used synonymously with sex. In my view I have come to understand that it is much more complex and does not simply refer to the act of sex but includes attitudes, behaviours and practices around sex. Weeks (2004, p.1) states that the more expert we become talking about sexuality the greater the difficulties we seem to encounter in trying to understand it. He adds that the mobility of sexuality is reminiscent of a chameleon, having the ability to take many guises and forms. Likewise Weeks (2004, pp. 1-2) proposes that we might see sexuality as a form of warmth, attraction, fear or hate, or even as social and cultural influences. Similarly sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction (WHO, 2002, p. 5). Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships (WHO, 2002, p. 5). While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. WHO (2002, p. 5) adds that sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (WHO, 2002, p. 5). Patricia and Mata (2006, p. 28) define sexuality as a constituent part of the human being, whose experience is associated with other fundamental life aspects such as thoughts, feelings and ways establishing relationships. Patricia and Mata (2006, p. 28) add that sexuality is not limited to intercourse, but is related also to affection, feelings, relationships, experiences and education. In a wider sense, Patricia and Mata (2006, p. 28) go on to state that sexuality includes all the possibilities that body and imagination offer us to feel and enables us to develop our ability to give pleasure.

People subscribe to various sexual behaviours, attitudes and practices. Likewise Patricia and Mata (2006, p. 29) suggest that sexual identity is not a label with which people are born but it is defined throughout life, through people with whom we share our sexuality. Some of different forms of sexual identity include homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality. Homosexuality is described by Patricia and Mata (2006, p. 30) as when people of the same sex are affectively and sexually attracted to each other whilst heterosexuality is described as when people of the

opposite sex are affectively and sexually attracted to each other. Patricia and Mata (2006, p. 34) describe bisexuality as when the person engages in sexual practices with both women and men. Mutua (2011, p. 457) significantly adds that from a dominant social view heterosexuality is one of the privileged sexualities as this type of sexual orientation is perceived as natural. Whilst each form of sexuality is different and complex likewise (Mutua, 2011,p. 457) encourages us to note that none of these forms of sexual orientation is normal or abnormal as whatever orientation one experiences is natural and furthermore that we should not privilege one orientation over the other.

In some African contexts there are polygamous unions. Vincent (2009, p. 63) highlights how polygamous unions experience male power and women abuse. Vincent (2009, p. 63) further adds that polygamous unions are not only a marker of inequality but represent the order of patriarchy in society. Vincent's 2009 study in particular notes that even though monogamous unions are more common in South Africa these types of relationships do not always survive or are lived as a reality. One of the general reasons that monogamous relationships cease is the fact of multiple partners. Vincent's study (2009, p. 63) states that the common reason for multiple partners is the economic dependence of women on men, in addition this does not only give men in the relationship the position to dictate the terms on intimate relationships but in return allows women access to resources especially when children are involved. In the next sub-section I discuss gender and sexuality and African girlhood.

### **2.3 Gender and sexuality: African girlhood**

Sexuality still remains taboo in many African communities. Khau (2009, p. 30) highlights that African girlhood sexuality remains a highly policed domain. Khau (2009, p. 30) states that one of the challenges that persist is the challenge of girls being able to negotiate the space of being a girl-child and a sexual being. Khau (2009) significantly highlights the silences the Basotho girls and women experience, as well as how their construction of girlhood is centred on the labial elongation. Khau, (2009, p. 32) notes that the practice of labial elongation is done primarily so that girls and women make their genitalia more attractive and effective for the sexual pleasure of

their partners. Participants in Khau's study (2009, p. 33) relate that girls have been warned that not having their labia pulled means that your husband would not have full sexual pleasure as well you would not be able to give birth. The ultimate objective of the elongation is to enhance heterosexual sex; the pulling of the labia enhances sexual pleasure for men and reduces sexual pleasure for women. In essence, Khau's 2009 study relates how the girls practise the labia elongation by themselves or get their mothers and their friends to do so. This has led to women and girls exploring different aspects of sexuality such as homosexuality (Khau, 2009).

Modern girls tend to be portrayed in terms of notions of independence, confidence and enlightenment, as time has passed and society becomes aware of modern ways of thinking. This has impacted on the liberation women and girls experience. In discussing African girlhood Ntombela and Mashiya (2009, p. 94) note the realities experienced by modern girls as compared to previous generations. This study in particular looks at the 'change' that has occurred in girlhood experiences. Ntombela and Mashiya (2009, p. 95) state that girls nowadays have access to numerous technological advances such as the internet, cell phones and unlimited TV channels, and girls go to school wearing fancy hairstyles and makeup. In addition a contemporary girl's wardrobe is versatile, for example, in that she has the choice of now wearing pants and dressing up with the latest trends. However Ntombela and Mashiya (2009, p. 95) add that these changes are able to come through the different socio-cultural contexts and that these socio-cultural contexts feed mobility.

Furthermore, Ntombela and Mashiya, (2009, pp. 95-105) state that although women and girls have access to these advancements and liberal choices, the roles of women and men have remained differentiated, for example, the engendered nature of chores. In essence Gupta, (2011, p. 371) notes that gender refers to the given expectations or characteristics within a society that is appropriate for men and women. She further adds that gender in any society establishes the foundation upon which power, status and privilege are conferred (ibid, 2011). Gupta (2011, p. 371) states that these constant gender inequalities in society between men and women play an important role in HIV epidemics, notably in Africa and Asia. Gupta (2011, p. 371) further deliberates that when these gender roles play out they reduce women's ability to determine the circumstances and outcomes of sexual encounters and relationships. Bell's findings (2012, p.

108) reflect the domestic roles of girls; these roles require them to spend a greater deal of time at home, whilst the boys are out to graze animals, buy food or go to the shop. Bell (2012, p. 108) further argues that this division of labour restricts woman's ability to move freely in the community, hence limiting their interaction with other people, restricting with whom they can share experiences and talk to for advice on sexual health, discuss their worries or generate an income.

Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 556) state that in a study conducted recently sexuality has been expressed beyond heterosexual desires and the evidence of lesbian sexualities is increasing. Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 557) further highlight that South Africa has achieved remarkable success in sexual equality, however there have been increasing reports displaying homophobic violence and corrective rape, They argue (2013, p. 557) that lesbian sexuality in South Africa has become common however often muted. In the next sub-section I discuss African women, sexual vulnerability and HIV/AIDS.

## **2.4 African women, sexual vulnerability and HIV/AIDS**

Fuller (2008) states that African women experience a number of vulnerabilities that feed the HIV/AIDS pandemic, namely physiological, socio-cultural, economic and educational vulnerabilities. Fuller (2008, p. 6) emphasizes that thin vaginas and genital mutilation are aspects that increase women's susceptibility to HIV/AIDS infection. She adds (2008, p. 35) that a double standard is at play in African society whereby it is understood that young women will enter into marriage as virgins and remain faithful. In contrast as Fuller (2008, p. 72) highlights, men expect a lot of sex and a variety of sexual partners, so faithfulness is not as significant an issue for men as it is for women. Fuller's study (2008, p. 73) further argues that the common practices of men having extramarital affairs and keeping mistresses along with marrying young women adds to the increased concern for the transmission of HIV/AIDS. The African family is described by Fuller (2008, p. 65) as a key unit, where respect for elderly is vital, but where a woman is given a derogatory role from the day she is born. Fuller (2008, p. 65) further states that the only place a woman asserts herself is in her home, dealing with the family welfare. She

(2008, p. 67) goes on to state that African custom demands that a girl never question a male and her subordinate position must not allow her to make choices except for choice regarding housekeeping. From the discussion above it is obvious that the customary African family clearly envisages that men are decision makers in many spheres of home and family life. This grants men a higher form of authority while it simultaneously increases women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Fuller, 2008).

One of the concerning findings of the South African National HIV Survey (2008, p. 30) was the sustained high levels of HIV infection among young females aged 15-19, as the female prevalence of HIV is 2.7 times higher than that of males. Casale et al. (2011, p. 301) state that sexual health and HIV-risk behaviours cannot be addressed effectively without paying adequate attention to constructions of gender and sexuality. They further note (2011, p. 301) that among young people in South Africa, little is known about how these identities are constructed. To add to this Casale et al. (2011) argue that the manner in which young people perceive and construct these identities ultimately exposes them to HIV vulnerability. In the next sub-section I discuss gender power, sexuality and sexual risk.

## **2.5 Gender power, sexuality and sexual risk**

Although women's rights movements and strides towards gender equality have become more prominent over the years, there is still a long way to go. Male power and male domination persist and, while research shows that there are young women who resist the gender norms, they operate within constraining contexts that limit their agency (Jewkes & Morrell, 2011; Bhana & Anderson, 2013, Mudaly, 2012). In this section I draw on studies that demonstrate the unequal power relationships that exist between men and women, and between boys and girls, particularly in the area of sexualities. The literature gleaned discusses power differentials and the ways in which they impact upon women's and men's experiences of sexuality.

Shabane's (2011, p. 62) study illustrates how social norms in communities contribute to the subordination that women experience. The young African women in this study articulate their

experience that gender roles and expectations are set out at home from simple roles such as household chores. Participants in this study state that African homes have different expectations of girls and boys and that often these expectations lead to young women's experiences of limited power, responsibilities and roles in the family (Shabane, 2011). Furthermore Jewkes & Wood (1997, p. 42) highlight that men have more control over sexuality; researchers in this study found that men partners define the conditions and timing of sex. This reveals that men are seen as dominant in negotiating sexual activity, while simultaneously it displays gender stereotypes of men's being in control and leading. Reddy and Dunne (2007, p. 163) report how in their study young women expressed a need to satisfy their loved ones' needs instead of their own, as being conventionally feminine is the ideal in a relationship, and that entails having to love, trust and make men happy. Reddy and Dunne (2007, p. 163) further report young women in this study as stating that it was easier to submit to unsafe sex practices than talk about safe sex practices to their partners, as bringing up issues of safe sex practices could label them as being 'cheap' or 'loose' by their partners. In this particular study Reddy and Dunne (2007, p. 165) also make us aware that young women reported that within their heterosexual relationships sexual decision making, negotiations and preferences were guided by their male counterparts.

In a more recent study Bhana and Pattman (2011) highlight the concept of provider masculinity; this concept is described in this study as men being in control and having power, but also that it not only through cultural practices or traditions that men uphold this power but through what men can provide, more especially the materialistic lifestyle; flashy cars, fashionable clothes, expensive dining, etc. To add to this they (2011, pp. 4-7) suggest that even though African men in South Africa come from marginalised economic livelihoods, African men still have the ability to provide and enjoy a more privileged economic stance than African women. Findings in the study (Bhana & Pattman, 2011, pp. 4-7) are that the perceptions of love expressed by young women in this study correlated with the material materialistic gains they achieved. This study also reports that there are young women who are not sexually active but have desires and envisage materialistic aspirations such fancy cars, mansions, lots of wealth, etc. In addition Bhana and Pattman (2011, pp. 4-7) further argue that young women maintain the notion of provider masculinity when they associate class and status with love. The study by Pettifor et al. (2012, p. 482) highlights young women's notions of power as having the ability to decide, say

and do what they like to in a relationship. In addition being financially independent and educated was mentioned in this study as something that gives women power, as money was linked to having the ability to make their own decisions and as well as to challenge their partners when disagreements arise in the relationship (WHO, 2002, p. 5; Pettifor et al., 2012).

In addition, Pettifor et al. (2012, p. 477) argue that the ideals of masculinity and femininity have the ability to limit South African women's decision making power in relationships and increase their risk of HIV infection. Pettifor et al.'s (2004) study in particular has presented evidence that women who have experienced no control in the relationship and who have forced and non-consensual sex are to a significant degree associated with inconsistent condom use, and are more likely to contract the HIV infection (Pettifor et al., 2004). In Shabane (2011, p. 54) the argument is that gender power inequalities shape the ways young women construct meaning around sexuality; likewise this study demonstrates how unequal gender power relations impact the lives of young women especially when it comes to social choices in their lives (Shabane, 2011). Shabane (2011, p. 61) further elaborates that young women in this study experienced limited sexual power; this has restricted their control of sexual activities, choices and decision making. In the next sub-section I discuss gender, culture and sexuality.

## **2.6 Gender, culture and sexuality**

Polygamy is sanctioned in many parts of the world as Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 10) show. These researchers (Banerjee & Sharma, 2007, p. 10) further articulate the view that polygamy operates to create concurrent sexual networks; in addition polygamous unions reinforce patriarchal notions of women as passively accepting their partners' sexual decision making. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 10) further highlight the strong patriarchal notions that undermine woman's ability to negotiate condom use. Hallman (2005, p. 44) argues that in developing countries the practice of women having multiple partners can be largely described as economic whereas men's having multiple partners can be attributed to cultural practices. Hallman (2005, p. 44) elaborates that in African settings a male having multiple partners is

accepted by both genders. A profound example of polygamy is practised by our state President Jacob Zuma; he has five marital relationships and fathers twelve children (Zeitzen, 2010). This highlights the tolerance and acceptance of polygamy in the African culture. Zeitzen (2010) adds that President Zuma describes his polygamous actions as being 'my culture' and connecting him to his pre-colonial traditions. Zeitzen (2010) questions how a modern president practises polygamy, as polygamy is deemed as archaic and patriarchal.

Akwara et al. (2003, p. 395) highlights in a study done in Kenya that a higher percentage of men than women were reported as engaging in risky sexual behaviour and the common form of risky sexual behaviour was noted as men having multiple partners and women having a casual partner. Young men in this study related that financial difficulties occurred when they had to provide for the needs of the young women in their lives and instead of their own. In addition young women in this study related that being married at an early age and not being able to provide sufficient income in the household fuels the issue of poverty (Bell, 2012). Ogana (2006, p. 70) argues that the system of patriarchy, which advocates gender inequality, endows men with greater social power over women worldwide. The trend is even more evident when it comes to older men, who also wield the authority that comes with age.

Sathiparsad et al. (2008, p. 4) highlights that despite the fact our South African Constitution recognises women and men as equal before the law, the media portray reports of male domination and oppression of women, largely in the form of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The study by Sathiparsad et al. (2008, pp. 4-5) highlights how highly patriarchal South African societies are; in addition Sathiparsad et al. (2008) report how patriarchal values feed the male domination and oppression women experience as well as bolster the privileged positions men occupy in society. They further (Sathiparsad et al., 2008, pp. 8-11) discuss that patriarchal values such as men controlling and heading the household, making decisions, etc, impact the nature of relationships and communication between parents and children. Adding to the aspect of male domination Sathiparsad et al. (2008, p. 11) reports how young men are given preferential treatment at home. Findings in this study include how boy children in households are given better education, but at the same time this study reveals that trends are changing; assertion by women is growing, although change is still slow paced in rural areas. Nyawose (2011, p. 43)



states that young women viewed culture as influencing their risky sexual behaviours, as young women in this particular study disclosed that culture does not allow you to use condoms and forces them to marry even though they are not ready. However in the same study Nyawose (2011, p. 43) states some young women believed that culture is right because it teaches them how to behave as women. These women collude with their own oppression.

Ogana (2006, p. 75) highlights a significant aspect related to sexuality; homosexuality is still perceived as 'unAfrican' and stigmatised as a European invasion into African culture, so many African homosexuals are despised, derided and ostracized. In addition Ogana (2006, p. 76) states that homosexuals often keep their sexuality a secret, due to the stigmatization. Ogana (2006, p. 76) further elaborates that heteronormativity obscures issues of sexual orientation and does not take cognisance of homosexuals and bisexuals in understanding reproductive health in the era of HIV/AIDS.

Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 16) state that religion and religious beliefs are the foundations of community life in a majority of societies. In addition religion prescribes ethical guidelines for many aspects of daily life and also navigates belief systems and norms surrounding sexuality. They add (Banerjee & Sharma, 2007, p. 16) that the majority of religiously tailored belief systems condemn premarital sex, contraception including condom use, and homosexuality. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 16) note that some religions also advocate a submissive role for women, foster gender inequality in marital relations, and promote women's ignorance in sexual matters as a symbol of purity. The sexuality and gender stereotypes constructed by religion can inhibit prevention efforts and increase vulnerability to HIV infection (Banerjee & Sharma, 2007). In the next sub-section I discuss young women and sexual agency.

## **2.7 Young women and sexual agency**

As has been demonstrated earlier in this literature review, studies have shown how African femininities have been homogenised. African women have been and still are viewed as passive docile victims of male sexual power. Despite this, studies have shown that there are women who

resist such power over them, and are taking control and exercising their human rights and taking control of their sexualities (Jewkes & Morrell, 2011; Bhana, 2011; Reddy & Dunne, 2007). Jewkes and Morrell (2011, p. 5) state that whilst young women might have attained considerable agency in choosing their partners, power within the relationships continues to be limited. Jewkes and Morrell (2011, p. 5) further argue that young men often are in control of the decision making regarding sex. In addition the study by Jewkes and Morrell (2011) indicates that one of the reasons young women's agencies was so limited is that men are expected to control women by both non-violent and violent methods. Bhana and Pattman (2011, p. 6) emphasize that a minority of young women are able to recognise a coercive sexual environment and exercise agency, whilst a small number of women might have expressed their sexual agency. This indeed reveals that not all young women are victims of male sexual power and certainly young women are beginning to build resistance against male power (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). The writers (Bhana & Pattman, 2011, p. 6) draw our attention to the aspect of sexual power, and in particular affirm that young African women are not simply victims of sexual power. This study in particular reports that there are young African women have the ability to assert agency in relationships and exercise resistance. Firmin (2011, p. 40) claims that young women in the study firmly believe that reserving one's reputation and dignity as a young woman means that you should hold onto your virginity for as long as you can. Firmin (2011, pp. 54-55) adds that young women are not simply victims of the gender order any longer, furthermore, that young women are challenging the gender order in society, for example, by attempting to take control of sexual decision making and by changing the pre-existing power dynamics.

The study by Nyawose (2011, p. 46) reports that some young women in this study were able to maintain power over sexual practices and were able to say no to sex to their boyfriends. Nyawose's study (2011, p. 49) elaborates that young women believed that the Government must reward the girls who are still virgins as a means of motivating others. Moreover this study indicates that entering a marriage as a virgin is perceived as a gift and that a man will pay more for you as your virginity is valued. Nyawose (2011, p. 49) goes to say that young women stated that most of the elders in the community motivate young girls to preserve virginity for marriage. In a recent study conducted by Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 555) it is argued that the fact that girls have the ability to negotiate timing of sexual activity points to sexual assertiveness and is

particularly helpful in reversing the thinking about African girls' lack of sexual agency. In the next sub-section I discuss gender, sexuality and sexual coercion.

## **2.8 Gender, sexuality and sexual coercion**

Violence in South Africa has been a prevalent issue and it has been observed that violence occurs mainly in heterosexual relationships, including in school settings as well. Violence faced by women includes rape, coerced sex, sexual harassment and physical abuse (Banerjee & Sharma, 2007). The literature discussed below highlights how gender inequalities experienced by women in particular feed coercion in relationships. In addition gender-based violence has been reported in many studies (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Banerjee & Sharma, 2007). Violence is noted in part as a means of demanding sexual activity. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 12) state that the facets of violence within a household can be described as including battering by an intimate partner, marital rape, dowry related violence and sexual abuse, whilst violence outside the household can be described as rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and assault. Gender-based violence has been noted to be inflicted predominantly by men on women.

Jewkes et al. (2010, p. 41) argue that violence occurs as a consequence of gender inequities that exist in relationships. Wilson (2003) reports in her study that sexual violence is inflicted on girls by teachers and boys; it has also been noted that in this study that girls are afraid to report sexual harassment as there is a fear of facing daily assault and there was no protection for them after reporting the incidents. Thus, it is no surprise that 50% of all people living with HIV are women and girls aged 15-24 years and women are as much as eight times more likely than men to be HIV positive (UNAIDS, 2010). Casale et al. (2011, p. 301) report that women in their study would be reluctant to leave a man on whom she depended financially, even at the cost of tolerating abuse and unfaithfulness. Ilkkaracan and Jolly (2007, p. 4) argue that gender influences sexuality and that gender norms portray the expectations that men and boys, women and girls are to conform to. The study by Bhana (2011, pp. 1-2) highlights the heightened vulnerability to gender violence and HIV/AIDS young women at school face. This study in particular raises awareness around the sexual coercion, rape and harassment young women face,

especially young African women that come from poor townships. Bhana (2011, pp. 1-2) adds that race and class inequalities feed and create the vulnerabilities of violence and HIV/AIDS risk young women face in South Africa. In the next sub-section I discuss early sexual debut.

## **2.9 Early sexual debut**

Being sexually active and engaging in sexual activities at an early age heightens the risk young people are putting themselves too. Young people are highly vulnerable to risk. This literature below explores some of the factors that contribute to an early sexual debut. The South African National HIV Survey (2008, pp. 1-5) and Setswe and Zuma (2010) have highlighted that the age at which an individual becomes sexually active has relative importance, as it puts emphasis on the age at which the individual is at risk to contracting the infection. Malcolm and Phillips (2006, p. 433) relate that in their study, it was found that there was a high prevalence of learners having intercourse before the age of 14 years. Significantly in this study Malcolm and Phillips (2006) elaborate that of the learners having intercourse before the age of 14 years, most Black learners reported having more than one sexual partner. Bell (2012, p. 288) highlights in a study done recently how young men experience social pressure that is verbal and observable from elder peers, pressure that influences them into sexual relationships. Lebeset et al. (2011) have shown in their study that the media were the main source of information on sexual health; none of the participants in this study reported parents as their sources of information; in fact it was evident in this study that the participants stated that they heavily relied on media for information. However it is also noted in this study (Lebeset et al., 2011) that the media can carry misleading information on sexuality, and it is here that myths and misconceptions of sexuality surface.

According to the Department of Health (2012), in South Africa there is concern over the continuing problem of unintended pregnancies in the particularly vulnerable group of adolescents and young women with HIV. In trying to alleviate the issue around unintended pregnancy and transmission of HIV, the Department of Health has not indicated an age restriction for the access of contraceptives, such as the oral contraceptive pill, Progestogen-only pills, Progestogen injectables, Progestogen implants, intrauterine contraception and emergency

contraceptive Pills, female sterilisation and barrier methods (male and female condoms). The Department of Health (2012, p. 59) reports that adolescents as young as the ages of 12 -19 experience high rates of unintended pregnancy; this indicates an urgent need for effective appropriate sexual education and services. Hence the Department of Health does not deny any contraceptive method based on young age alone. In addition, most of the above measures of contraception are available in the public sector and some are free of charge, for example condoms (available at schools/clinics) and the oral contraceptive pill at clinics. This policy does not only allow young children from age 12 onwards to gain access contraceptives but it simultaneously allows young people autonomy to control their sexual lives. In the next sub-section I discuss peer pressure, sexuality and sexual risk.

## **2.10 Peer pressure, sexuality and sexual risk**

Lebese et al. (2011) argue that peer pressure has seemingly influenced young women and men to engage in sexual activities. It has been noted in the study by Lebese et al. (2011) that peers were the source of information about sexual issues and peers who were not knowledgeable about aspects pertaining to sex were disregarded or not allowed in the group. This study also reported that peers are a good source of information but information shared between peers can be misleading and incorrect (Lebese et al., 2011). Bell (2012, p. 288) reports that young men experienced peer pressure in the form of verbal encouragement and observing others enjoying being in relationships. In comparison, young women experienced peer pressure in the form of pervasive talk about sexual relationships from adult men or men older in age. Shabane (2011, p. 73) asserts that the 'absence' of the verbal and physical pressure becomes the real pressure where young women in this study related that not being able to contribute to discussions about sexual matters within your circle of friends encourages one to engage in sexual activities. Whilst peer pressure might be an influential aspect in young people's sexual lives, Shabane (2011, p. 74) states that an element of carelessness exists between both young women and men, whereby young people despite their being knowledgeable of aspects such as disease, teen pregnancy, etc., experiment with their bodies.

A recent study conducted by Nyawose (2011, p. 39-40) indicates that the age 16-17 years is a time when young women conform strongly to peer norms. Furthermore, peer influences are very powerful, with young people doing things to please their friends. Nyawose (2011, p. 39-40) adds that young girls engage themselves in sexual risk behaviours for peer acceptance, and to compete with their friends' experiences. Ogana (2006, p. 66) adds that findings conducted in a township setting indicate that it appears that the label of 'virgin' also has negative connotations for girls, and implies that a girl who is still a virgin is considered 'unworthy' of being part of her peer group. In the next sub-section I discuss knowledge of sexuality.

## **2.11 Knowledge of sexuality**

Being knowledgeable about sexuality does not only allow you to gain understanding of the issue especially in relation to decision making about aspects related to sexuality. From literature discussed below it is evident that young people are limited in numerous ways of attaining information and knowledge regarding sexuality. Gupta et al. (2011, pp. 375-376) make us aware that limited understanding of the complexity and variability of human sexuality and its interactions with gender in different settings has routed the spread of sexual transmission of the HIV/AIDS infection. Gupta et al. (2011, pp. 375-376) further notes that in order to bridge the gaps that exist in knowledge one has to fully understand the different social and cultural contexts and how they come across in the different phases of life. Peltzer et al.'s findings (2005, p. 4) highlight that young men and women are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS, but that in addition these young people's knowledge about transmission of the HIV/AIDS infections were based mostly on myths about HIV/AIDS.

In addition the research by Peltzer et al. (2005, p. 3) argues that young men and women from urban schools had significantly better HIV/AIDS knowledge compared to young men and women from non-urban schools, and additionally lower levels of HIV/AIDS knowledge was common among the Black/African learners. Likewise, Magnani et al. (2005, p. 297) argue that life skills education must improve in order for new HIV/AIDS cases to be averted. Campbell et

al. (2005, p. 473) notes in some cases young people are in the capacity of accurate information regarding health risk, behaviour change, HIV/AIDS prevention and transmission. However Campbell et al. (2005, p. 473) further elaborate that there are several factors that prevent young people from acting on this information such as curiosity, where despite being knowledgeable, young people experiment. Ogana (2006, p. 67) notes that a misconception that needs to be acknowledged in HIV/AIDS interventions is the assumption that young girls are merely objects that males can act upon sexually. The reality is that girls also have sexual desire; a taboo subject that is often skirted by the girls themselves and society at large (Ogana, 2006).

Despite the limitations young people experience in attaining information and knowledge regarding sexuality, Anderson (2013, p. 6) argues that young girls in her study were able to regulate their sexualities and pursue sexual purity by subscribing to Christian values and teachings derived from the Bible. Anderson (2013, p. 6) goes on to add that the residents of the community where her study was conducted have turned to religion and religious devotion to counter and regulate sexual behaviours and reign in inappropriate behaviours. Young girls in Anderson's (2013, p. 6) study control their sexualities from the values, knowledge and teachings Christianity advocates. In the next sub-section I discuss young women, intergenerational sex and transactional sex.

## **2.12 Young women: Intergenerational sex and transactional sex**

Intergenerational sex is described in the South African National HIV Survey (2008, p. 1-5) as age-mixing sex. Muula (2008) suggests that intergenerational sex facilitates HIV transmission and often occurs when older men who are infected have sex with younger women. In a recent study Bhana (2012, p. 3) has found male teachers are interested in girls and young women at school; it is apparent that male teachers who come from a higher economic status are able to use gifts and money to influence girls who come from a low economic status. Bhana's (2012, p. 5) study states that stepfathers and uncles are active within the broader patriarchal relations that increase young women's vulnerability to risky sexual behaviour. Furthermore in this particular study participants shared that their uncles and stepfathers had intentions to have sexual

relationships with them (Bhana, 2012). Bhana (2012, p. 5) argues that the 'sugar daddy' phenomenon thrives in resource-poor contexts and the facilitation here of relationships operates on the basis of exchange. Firmin (2011, p. 45) likewise asserts that young women in this study expressed the need to date older men on the basis of the monetary gain such as airtime and jewellery and not just stability. On the other hand, Firmin (2011, p. 40) states that young women preferred to date young men who were virgins to avoid the pressure of having to be asked to engage in sexual activities. Firmin (2011, p. 46) adds that the 'sugar daddy phenomenon' thrives in low socio-economic areas, compared to areas of high socio-economic development. This comparison is further highlighted where Firmin (2011, p. 46) states that young women from affluent high socio-economic areas reject the idea of asking and/or taking anything of monetary value from their partners in a relationship and instead act as agents of social change in the sense that they want to be independent. Whilst some young women might encounter sexual activity on the basis of material gain, Bhana (2011, p. 3-4) highlights that there are instances of young girls at school experiencing rape or sexual harassment from male teachers. Ogana (2006, p. 70) adds that when it comes to intergenerational sex, sexual misconceptions are held by both partners. Ogana (2006, p. 70) states that, for young girls, the assumption is that because she is sexually active she is mature enough to handle an older sexual partner. Ogana (2006, p. 70) goes to say that some young girls succumb easily to sex since they are socialised culturally from a young age to be subservient to older men in general. Such a dynamic in intergenerational relationships is reinforced by the structures of patriarchal power, which makes it difficult for girls to insist on safer sex or simply to say "no" to sex.

Muula (2008) argues that the racial segregation and discrimination experienced during apartheid has left especially Black women uneducated, thus women use transactional sex to escape poverty and unemployment. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) state that black African women, generally without the means to be economically independent, have often been dependent on black African men and this, together with cultural practices of respect, has promoted obedience and passivity as hallmarks of African femininity. Jewkes and Wood (1997, p. 42) found that relationships were perceived as contractual, whereby young girls are expected to have sex in exchange of materialistic gain. In a study conducted by Bell (2012, p. 292) findings suggest that poverty arise from new financial responsibilities, such as early marriage or single motherhood.



Casale et al. (2011, p. 303) argue that findings in their study indicate that women engage in transactional sex in order to support their families as well. In this study men and women agreed that transactional sex could sometimes be the only strategy for acquiring material goods in an impoverished setting. Gupta et al. (2011, p. 376) notably argue that 'transactional sex' for women in some instances is a symbol of a woman's worth and/or an expression of a man's love and appreciation. These women felt that because sex is valued by men, women should not give it away for free; men should express their appreciation by sharing their material resources (Gupta, 2011). In a recent study conducted by Shabane (2011, p. 69) young women revealed that dating young men of the same age brought relatively little material gain, in the sense that young men can afford to give these young women goods of limited value, such as a movie ticket; whereas dating men that are older in age allows them to attain more values, such as food, money and clothing. However the young women in Shabane (2011) study acknowledged that material gain was only possible through return of sexual favours.

In a study done in Mozambique, Groes-Green (2009, p. 235) highlights that young people from the middle class show a greater interest in pregnancy prevention and in HIV/AIDS programmes than the young people from the working class sector. Young people from the middle class reflected on the importance of sexual behaviour as they were able to perceive that early pregnancy and diseases could inhibit future careers, employment and endanger possible opportunities (Groes-Green, 2009). Likewise the study by Groes-Green (2009, p. 235) indicates that working class families in this study are ignorant of prevention and sexual behaviour. Firmin's study (2011, pp. 40-41) reports that young women determine economic status by the clothing young men wear. This study offers us insight that the brand of clothing worn is not only an indicator of the social class an individual comes from but is used to signify the sexual prowess of a young man. Hence, the more expensive the clothing labels, the greater the number of girlfriends he could gain (Firmin, 2011, pp. 40-41). Moreover Firmin (2011, pp. 43-44) adds that some young women battle to find a partner who has expensive clothing and good taste, but they also struggle with their own clothing and confidence issues as well, because if they do not dress well then they too 'do not fit in with the rest'. In the next sub-section I discuss young people and condom use.

## 2.13 Young people and condom use: An issue of [un]safe sex

The South African National HIV Survey (2008, pp. 1-5) highlights that despite condoms being readily available in South Africa to young women and men, there has been a low and inconsistent use or sometimes non-use of the product. Groes-Green (2009, p. 233) highlights that in a study done in Mozambique, among youth, consistent condom users was prevalent in middle class and urban areas whilst poorer or working class areas tended not to use condoms. King and Marston (2006, p. 1583) further state that use of condoms is associated with lack of trust and can be stigmatising, especially in South Africa. They report (2006, p. 1583) that wanting to use a condom can be interpreted as meaning that you are carrying the disease. This indicates that areas with a higher economic status are more knowledgeable about condom use, or it might indicate the ignorance some people have towards the use of condoms. Groes-Green (2009, p. 235) further elaborates that young men coming from the middle class sector in a Mozambique claim that by using condoms, life is protected and that you have something to live for. Groes-Green (2009, p. 235) in addition argues that the young men in the study that came from the working class state that their belief in not using condoms stemmed from the notion that since very little opportunity existed for them in terms of having a career someday; they might as well have fun and live in the moment. To add to this Groes-Green (2009, p. 236) states the study highlights having sex without a condom was noted as 'pure sex', young men in this study justify pure sex as being *moluwne*, denoting a 'wildman'.

Findings in Nyawose's study (2011, p. 41) indicate that, despite the South African Government supplying condoms free of charge as a means of reducing risk taking behaviours, young people are knowledgeable about the use of condoms, but are not doing anything about it and others do not want to use them. In addition Nyawose (2011, pp. 41;44) reports that young women in her study stated that they do not plan sex, it just happens; and by using condoms it just spoils the mood and lastly that getting condoms from a clinic is problematic. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 28) claim that many men are reluctant to use them due to the perceptions that condom use reduces sexual pleasure. In addition Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 28) state that due to cultural

and religious constructs, married women are often not able to negotiate condom use for fear of being accused of infidelity or resistance to bearing children. Groes-Green (2009, p. 236) significantly states that there is a social distinction between the working class and middle class in terms of condom use. Some of Groes-Green's (2009, p. 236) findings reflect that girls from a lower strata are referred to as 'Golpistas', as young girls from this sector want to intentionally become pregnant to ensure that a partner will marry them, provide child support or blackmail a partner that might be married. The young men in Groes-Green (2009, p. 236) also recognise the importance of condom use, as they acknowledge the benefit it has in preventing illness and also from keeping away from the 'Golpistas'. Groes-Green's (2009, p. 236) study defines these 'Golpistas' as suspicious that girls will give boys a punctured condom to use whilst some 'Golpistas' go to the extent of tearing the condom in the heat of the moment. In a study conducted by Harrison (2008, p. 181) in cases where some young men and women believe in abstinence until married, the young men indicated that young women who are not virgins are behaving 'inappropriately'; additionally young women in this study stated that sex is wrong. Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 27) argues in a recent study conducted that the inability to negotiate condom use in young girls are situated in the context of gender dynamics, where power is vested with the boys.

Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 27) further elaborate that young girls in this study express the desire to make use of condoms, however the findings in Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 30) illustrate that boys control the conditions of sex. In addition to girls being alert to vulnerability and alert to sexual risk, they (girls) are caught within the network of sexual and gender relations, in particular being in a subordinate position and being restricted in choices regarding gender equitable relationships (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). In the next sub-section I discuss risky sex, love and trust.

## **2.14 Risky sex, love and trust**

Reddy and Dunne's (2007) study has revealed that young women link sexual activity and love as a legitimate reason to engage in sex. In this particular study of Reddy and Dunne (2007, p. 161)

young women found to be engaging in unsafe sex practices based principally on the desire to be loved or to love. Reddy and Dunne's (2007, p. 162) study highlights to us that young females are willing to compromise their agency in relationships despite the risks involved, and that young females feel that having unprotected sex with their partners will increase the love and bond they share. In addition Reddy and Dunne's (2007, p. 162) study demonstrates that the young women in this study contradictorily regard '*unprotected sex*' as '*safe sex*' and '*protected sex*' as '*unsafe safe sex*'. Another study conducted by Reddy and Dunne (2007, p. 3) demonstrates that young women have an ardent interest in romantic love and its promises, as compared to the young men. In addition, young men are aware of these young women's desires and in turn manipulate this awareness by often admitting false love to gain access to sex, and more especially risky sexual behaviours (Reddy & Dunne, 2007). The association and construction of the word love in Bhana and Pattman's (2011, p. 6) study highlights to us how young women and men associate money with love, this study significantly displays 'that people that have economic resources are seen as attractive'. In a recent study Firmin (2011, p. 39) argues that young women tended not to use condoms if they were on contraceptives such as an 'injection' as they felt that if they were in love then trust automatically set in, in the relationship. Likewise, Firmin (2011, p. 39) adds that love and trust are aspects which place many young girls in danger of HIV infection. Allen's (2003) study highlights that in some instances girls want sex and boys want love, likewise Allen (2003, p. 232) suggests that the notion that young women want only love from relationships and young men prefer sex is outdated.

Harrison's (2008, pp. 180-181) study highlights a key element 'attitudes towards sexuality'; it is here that she brings forth the importance of 'good behaviour' in the Zulu culture. She goes to say that in her study conducted both young women and men related the importance of 'good behaviour'. In addition, 'Good behaviour' was an essential characteristic for a girlfriend. Harrison (2008, pp. 181) describes 'good behaviour' as not having multiple partners, honesty, decency and having in place modest sexual behaviour. Bell (2012, pp. 287) highlights that young people of all ages explained that having sex was natural, influenced by their 'stage' of development when new sexual urges, desires and emotions are experienced. These feelings were associated with growing up and becoming mature. Bell (2012, pp. 287) goes on to say that some of the reasons young people initiated relationships were for love, affection, feelings of pleasure,

warmth and exploration, as well as enjoying life with somebody and having someone with whom to talk freely and discuss problems. Firmin (2011, pp. 36) highlights that the young women in her study were attracted to the strength, power and domination of young men, in addition, physical attraction was vital whilst personality did not seem of importance. Firmin (2011, pp. 36) further elaborates that this type of perception reproduces gender norms for young women by indicating what is socially acceptable. In the next sub-section I discuss the role of schools and parents in disseminating information on sex and sexuality.

## **2.15 The role of schools and parents in disseminating information on sex and sexuality**

Morrell et al. (2012, p. 13) state that Apartheid left South Africa with an unusual pattern of family structure, with at least forty percent of households which are female headed. Morell et al. (2012, pp. 13-14) argue that fathers therefore have had little engagement in the upbringing of the child and typically households are headed by one adult only. As a result one of the major implications that surfaces is, as Campbell et al. (2005, p. 473) put forward, that young people receive inadequate support and guidance from the family unit regarding aspects of sexual health; it appears that some parents lack the confidence to advise their children appropriately as they themselves are not knowledgeable on certain aspects pertaining to sexual health. Lebesse et al. (2011) highlights that school environments are a place where young women and men rely on information regarding sexuality since most information could be obtained here. Nyawose (2011, p. 53) states that schools are seen as the place that has the potential to cascade important information to young people and that can assist in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS through sexually risky behaviours. Gilchrist and Sullivan (2006, p. 206) add that parents are often seen as unapproachable by young people struggling to establish their sexual identity because they are perceived to have a conservative stance on sex. Dialogues between young men, women and their parents have been deemed to be a sensitive area when the topic of sexuality is addressed. Studies have related that most young people find difficulty in speaking about aspects of sexuality to their parents (Lebesse et al., 2011).

Nyawose (2011, p. 39) confirms in her study that elders or parents have a very limiting role in educating young women about aspects of sexuality. In addition Nyawose (2011, pp. 51-52) goes on to state that young women in this study echoed the sentiments that parent-child communication is vital, young women in this study believed that, since parents are close to their children, parents should be first in discussing sexual issues. Some young women in this particular study Nyawose (2011, pp. 51-52) states felt that parents often just tell them not to involve themselves with sex issues but do not tell them why they must not do those things. To overcome the parent child communication barrier Nyawose (2011, pp. 51-52) suggests that since parents are failing to educate their children on sexual issues, elders in the community must do so and this would in return not tempt young people to experiment.

## **2.16 Theoretical framework: Social constructionism**

This study draws on social constructionist perspectives to understand how these young African girls construct themselves and others as sexual subjects and how social processes and actions feed their understandings of and engagement in sexual risk. The theory of social constructionism allows us to analyse how constructions of knowledge are formed in our daily interactions and how our language influences our interactions with people. Burr (1995, p. 7) suggests that language is a form through which we express ourselves, also when we talk to each other we construct worlds. Burr (1995, p. 7) asserts that language is regarded as the passive vehicle of our thoughts and emotions. Knowledge sustained by social processes and languages as a form of social action is also forms of enquiry. The social constructionist perspective invites us to be critical of the idea that observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, and to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world (Burr, 1995). This perspective draws attention to the multiple realities and hence multiple sexual identities, rejecting a homogeneous sexuality.

A frame of enquiry Burr (1995, p. 4) stresses that it is through daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated. Likewise the people we constantly engage with influence our understandings of the world, it is here that we

perceive and share knowledge. The theory of social constructionism is used as a lens to analyse my data; it acknowledges that the young women in this study are not simply passive recipients of male domination but are sexual agents who actively construct their sexual identities, negotiate and navigate their context and are implicated in constructing the identities of others. The study acknowledges the relational nature of gender and formation of masculine and feminine identities. The study pays attention to the ways in which girls are either complicit in or resist forms of male power and analyses how their expressions and articulations demonstrate this.

## **2.17 Conclusion**

This chapter has synthesised scholarly works conducted in the fields of sexuality, gender, HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour and risk. The various studies presented in this chapter have been conducted both locally and internationally. This chapter further presented the theoretical framework employed to analyse and interpret data collected in this study. The following chapter discusses the research design and methodology that this study has utilised. Furthermore this chapter sets out a detailed description around the strategies employed to collect data in order to generate significant research information.

## **Chapter 3: Research design and methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This is a qualitative study and is situated within an interpretivist paradigm. The study has sought to investigate how young African girls attending an urban high school give meaning to their sexualities and how these meanings are related to sexual risk. My research is based on a case study of a group of African girls aged between 16 and 17. In this chapter I discuss in detail the research design and methodology utilized to obtain data and analyse data.

### **3.2 Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore how a group of African school girls attending an urban high school construct their sexual identities and how their particular constructions, perceptions and understandings are related to their engagement in risky sexual behaviours.

### **3.3 Research questions**

I explored this research by using the following questions below:

- What do these African schoolgirls regard as risky sexual behaviour?
- What kinds of risky sexual behaviours do these African high school girls engage in?
- How do these African school girls construct their sexualities?

### **3.4 Research design**

A research design, as described by Morse and Richards (2002, p. 66) is created by the researcher and is moulded by the research method and is responsive to the context and the participants of



the study. In addition Welman et al (2005, p. 52) highlight that a research design refers to the 'plan', obtaining research participants and collecting information from them. In this study I draw on qualitative methods within an interpretivist paradigm to explore how young African school girls understand, give meaning to and enact their sexuality, as well as how sexual risk is entrenched in these understandings, meanings and practices of their sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS. In the next sub-section I discuss the qualitative approach this study is situated in.

### ***3.4.1 Qualitative approach***

Cohen et al. (2011, p. 219) suggest that qualitative research enables one to understand how humans actively construct their own meanings of situations, how meanings arise out of social situations and how multiple realities are created. Similarly, my study seeks to find out how the girls in this study give meaning to their sexualities and the relation of those sexualities to sexual risk. The strength of qualitative inquiry lies in the integration of the research question, the data and the data analysis, as stated by Morse and Richards (2002, p. 1). Researchers (Morse & Richards, 2002, pp. 2-5) further elaborate that qualitative research provides a wide range of ways to explore and understand data, more to help us make sense of the world in a particular way. Morse and Richards (2002, p. 5) suggest that qualitative research provides us with a certain type of knowledge and with the tools to resolve the confusions. Welman et al., (2005, pp. 8-9) report that qualitative data enables the researcher to attain subjective data, and data that is presented in language rather than numbers. The qualitative approach as stated by Welman et al., (2005, pp. 8-9) employs flexible and explorative research methods. Furthermore, qualitative researchers base their findings on the daily events and behaviour of people. Lastly Welman et al., (2005, pp. 8-9) state that the research process within the qualitative approach is dynamic and changeable; furthermore that qualitative researchers make use of a holistic approach rather than a particularistic approach.

My study aimed to discuss how these girls give meaning to sexuality in relation to sexual risk and in doing so I employed the methods of individual interviews and focus group sessions, attempting to reach a holistic understanding of their experiences rather than a specific element.

These methods have thus enabled these young African girls to voice their opinions, engage in discussions and share their experiences of their sexuality. In addition it has created a platform for these school girls to explore and question their sexuality. In the next sub-section I discuss the interpretivist paradigm this study is situated within.

### ***3.4.2 Interpretivist paradigm***

This qualitative study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm. As Cohen et al. (2011, pp. 46) suggest, this paradigm is non-statistical; it aims to bring about individual perspectives, personal constructs and negotiated meanings. In addition Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 46) suggest that in this paradigm the researcher has a personal involvement in the study. Bailey (2007, p. 53) argues that a researcher who uses an interpretive paradigm involves empathetic understanding of participants' day-to-day experiences and an increased awareness of the multiple meanings given to the routine and problematic events by those in the setting. In addition Bailey (2007, p. 53) notes that research undertaken in the interpretivist paradigm focuses on social relationships, as well as the mechanisms and processes through which members in a setting navigate and create their social worlds. Hence a researcher using an interpretivist paradigm asks what kinds of things people do, how they do them, what activities serve, and what they mean to the participants. In the next section I discuss the research methodology utilised in this study.

## **3.5 Research methodology**

### ***3.5.1 Research site***

The research site is a public, co-educational and English medium high school in the Pinetown area, situated in the eThekweni region of the Umhlathuzana Circuit of the KwaZulu-Natal

Education Department. The research site is situated in a mixed class (working class and middle), urban area with a predominantly African population. However, the school population also includes Indian and Coloured learners. The research site is home to many learners that reside in the nearby areas of Cliffdale, Gillitts, Hammarsdale, Pinetown and New Germany as well the nearby township localities such as KwaDabeka, Clermont and Zamokuhle. Wimbeldon High School (pseudonym) is situated in an area with a mixed working and middle class context. Hence the community around the research site comprises a diverse range of people in terms of class and race. Informal settlements are present on the banks of the school premises. Most of learners attending the school walk to and from school, or commute by taxis or buses. Wimbeldon High School opened its doors in 1941 with a predominantly Indian teaching staff and learner population. Since the advent of democracy, Wimbeldon High School has drawn in African and Coloured learners and educators as well. Wimbeldon High School presently has a teaching staff of approximately 47 educators and a learner population of 1330 learners.

The high school is well developed and has an array of resources, such as an eco-club, swimming pool, netball, basketball court and a huge soccer field. Wimbeldon High School has a good infrastructure that accommodates 35 classes that start from Grade 8 and progress to Grade 12. The school is well secured with a state of the art security system such as electric fencing and CCTV coverage. The school is managed by a male principal and supported by a male-dominated management team. Wimbeldon High School offers its learners a wide range of academic and technical subjects. I chose this site for my research as I am a former learner at this school and because of the close proximity and convenience it had for me. In addition I am an educator at a primary school and do not have access to young people of the age group 16 -17 years old. I am familiar with the teaching staff of Wimbeldon High School, which facilitated gaining access to participants and entrance to the research site.

Upon my observation after numerous visits to the school I noticed that educators and learners have taken on initiatives in attempts to alleviate and aid the social issues such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. After interacting with some of the educators at the school, I became aware that a large number of learners at the school come from poverty-stricken homes or child-headed households, that there are many unsupportive parents that are not involved in their

child's education and that nine girls were pregnant in the year 2012. In addition I also learnt that the primary school located nearby the research site, also a feeder school to Wimbeldon Secondary, had five pregnant learners this year, the youngest being 10 years old. In addition, girls and boys are constantly reprimanded for selling and smoking drugs (dagga) on the school premises. Despite these obstacles that learners encounter on a daily basis, the school manages to maintain an 85% examination pass rate in the matriculation exam. In the next sub-section I discuss the process in which access was gained into the research site.

### ***3.5.2 Gaining access to the research site***

After a telephonic discussion with the head of the institution, I met him personally to discuss my study. From the outset he was very supportive and helpful. At this meeting I presented to him a letter seeking consent to conduct my study at the school. Together with the letter of informed consent I explained to him the aim of my study. He approached the school governing body on my behalf to request permission for my study to be conducted. Once approval was given by the school governing body, I requested assistance in selecting girls aged 16 to 17, not in matric preferably, so that the data collection process would not interfere with their final year studies. The sample selection was conducted based on availability to participate.

The school principal indicated that I could conduct my interviews during school hours or after school hours. He also made me aware that I was welcome to make use of his Grade 11 Life Orientation lessons, and was prepared to excuse girls that were participating. In addition the school principal advised that he would prefer that I chose my sample from the Grade 11 classes as he did not want to disturb Grade 12 learners and distract them from their learning time at school. The school counsellor and principal are Life Orientation educators at the school and have been serving at the school for long; hence most learners at the school are familiar with these educators. These educators were very cooperative, helpful and resourceful throughout my data collection process at the school. They ensured that participants attended interview sessions

timeously and also assisted me in arranging the venue for my interviews. In the next sub-section I discuss the sample utilised to elicit data in this study.

### ***3.5.3 Sampling***

The sample utilised in this study needed to consist of young African girls who attend an urban high school and are aged between 16 and 17. The sample strategy utilized in this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling. My intention of using a non-probability type of sampling is that with non-probability findings cannot be generalized beyond the sample in question (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 155). In addition some of the other advantages of using a non-probability form of sampling is that it is less complicated in setting up and it targets a specific group (Cohen et al., 2011).

Cohen et al. (2011, p. 156) describes a purposive sample as specifically or handpicked where researchers build the sample according to the needs of the study. To ensure the outcome of the study was fulfilled it was necessary to speak to young girls aged 16-17. Even though there are a minority of Indian and Coloured learners in this school, I chose to use a sample of African girls due to their availability. The African learners live in the area or in close proximity to the school and were available for interviews and focus group discussions after school hours whereas the Indian and Coloured learners do not live close by and their use of transportation rendered them unable to stay after school to participate in my study, hence the sample was selected on the basis of availability. I am an educator and even though the principal offered the use of the school and would assist in making the participants available during school hours, I was unable to conduct the interviews during school hours. My own obligations as an educator would not allow me to do this. Hence I could only conduct the interviews after school hours and it would only be a sample of girls from the area, that is, African girls.

After my sample was selected, I took the initiative to meet these girls on a separate day, and the school boardroom was used. Here I met the girls, for approximately one hour, and explained to them in detail the purpose of my study as well as the process, and related the relevance of

attaining informed consent. Thereafter we had a little introductory session where each girl was given the opportunity to introduce themselves, allowing them a better opportunity to get to know each other and me. In addition I allowed them to ask me questions related to the research; however most of them did not. This was done with the intention that they understand their roles in my study and have a chance to clarify any questions or concerns. This was also an attempt to get them to settle and to become more comfortable around me.

Seeing how reserved some of them were during this introductory session, I also shared with the girls a little about myself. Making use of an introductory session during the sample selection, I hoped that the girls would familiarize themselves with each other and also get to know me a little. I had to be mindful that these girls would be wary of me and my intentions and would initially be hesitant in responding to and disclosing personal information about themselves.

I thereafter proceeded to hand out consent letters to them all and requested that they speak to their parents or guardians about my study and attain consent. Arrangements were made that all the girls who were interested and had given consent would hand their letters to the school administrator who volunteered to help. I requested that all girls give me a contact number so I could make telephonic arrangements with them for times and venues for the interviews. Within two week all the forms were collected and I was able to arrange my sample of ten African girls who were between the ages of 16 and 17 years old.

I recall visiting the research site to confirm interview times and whilst I waited at the reception area of the school building there were three enthusiastic and friendly Indian girls who approached me and enquired about my study, it appeared that they had heard about my study from their classmates. Being of Indian origin myself I was able to identify with their interest in the topic that they had, and from personal experience parents talking to their children about sexuality is taboo. It then became apparent to me that there are young girls who are in need of an opportunity or platform to talk about sex and sexuality – a topic that is often considered a taboo in their communities and amongst elders and parents.

Being a novice researcher, once I completed the data collection and analysed the transcripts, I realized that the data I had collected was insufficient and that I required more rich, detailed and in-depth data. Hence I had to conduct more focus groups discussions to prompt and probe on certain aspects to yield more data. In spite of the protracted data collection process the girls proved to be co-operative and patient; they were fairly easy to work with, understanding and willing to assist in any way they could. In the next sub-section I discuss the data collection process.

#### ***3.5.4 Data collection***

The data collection methods I employed were ten individual semi-structured, open-ended interviews, where all ten participants were interviewed. Eight focus group discussions were conducted altogether, comprising of six participants in each focus group. I conducted all the individual interviews first and the focus group discussions followed. After realising that the data I had collected was insufficient, I decided that in order to attain more rich, detailed and in-depth data I would add more focus groups discussions to my data collection. All sessions, individual and focus groups were approximately 30 to 45 minutes long. The participants that had been interviewed individually volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews on the basis of availability. The advantages of using semi-structured interviews in qualitative research are that interviews are flexible, lively, interactive and rich in detail (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 100). Cohen et al. (2011, p. 409) elaborate that an interview is a flexible tool for data collection as the order of the interview can be controlled whilst giving space for spontaneity. The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview schedule that comprised open-ended questions. The interview schedule was divided into four sections and each section covered different aspects such as the biographical aspects of the participant, schooling life of the participant, and various questions discussing aspects related to sexuality.

According to Patton (2002, p. 385) a focus group is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic; groups are typically six to ten people with similar backgrounds. The advantages of using a focus group discussion are that through the interaction of the group data emerges

(Cohen et al., 2011, p. 436). Welman et al. (2005, pp. 201-204) state that focus groups provide sources of information rapidly and at low cost, and focus groups enable the participants in the group to discuss their opinions and experiences in such a way that a consensus of opinion regarding research problems can be reached as well. They are thus very useful in the sense that it allows participants to share their opinions that may lead to new ideas. However, the disadvantages of using a focus group discussion, as described by Welman et al. (2005, p. 204), is that there is a possibility that responses from participants can be inhibited, as some participants are not able to freely express their feelings, as they could feel intimidated by the presence of other group participants. This was overcome by affording the more inhibited participants a chance to speak more freely in the individual interviews. Both the individual and focus group questions were flexibly designed, allowing the researcher to probe on certain questions and also allowed the participants freedom to determine the pace and direction of the discussions.

Initially I had planned to conduct four group discussions. However after looking at the insufficient data as mentioned earlier I conducted four more group discussions. I improvised and made a concerted effort to prompt and probe more as well as to get the participants to explain and elaborate more on their responses. This yielded more rich data. At times I appeared to be naïve to the participants, but this also forced them to provide explanations which enhanced the data. All focus group discussions had topics which I wanted them to discuss. At times when they were not responding, I asked questions, and leading questions were also used to explore hidden attitudes and guide the group theme for discussion (Welman et al., 2005, pp. 202-203). The data collection process took place in June-September 2012; owing to my data being insufficient I returned to the research site early in January 2013 to collect more data. Initially I planned to conduct my focus group discussions first and thereafter conduct the individual interviews. The reason for my intention to conduct the focus group discussions first as that the participants would be settled with the topic and would have each other so that they might gain some confidence when amongst their peers. In addition I anticipated that the focus group discussion would be an opportunity for the participants to get to know each other in a non-threatening environment where they are in the majority and not feel intimidated by me, the researcher. The intention that individual interviews would be after the focus groups assumed that by then participants would have an idea of the expected topic and issues to be discussed and



would be more willing to talk on a more personal and individual level. However from my experience of researching a sensitive topic such as sexuality I found that building trust with the participants was a huge challenge, even though I was able to settle them down quite early and easily and engage in an informal conversation. The participants took a while to open up and discuss and express themselves. Prior to my commencing with the interviews at the outset of each individual interview, I made it clear to my participants that if they disclosed anything that was detrimental to their well-being or the well-being of others I would feel compelled to intervene in whichever way it would be necessary and that they were free to withdraw from the research before we began.

I conducted all interview sessions after school as this would not disrupt learners from their class time, however, taking advantage of the fact that the learners remained at school after the examination being written, I saw this as good timing. When I arrived at the research site to conduct the focus group discussions some of participants did not show up and some had to leave school early for personal reasons, as it was during the June 2012 exam time that I started collecting data. Nevertheless I managed to conduct two interviews on that day. I returned in July 2012 and conducted the remaining participants' individual interviews. The school counsellor had made arrangements for me to use her counselling room which was situated next door to the classrooms. The room had tinted windows, and a few charts highlighting relationships, abuse and violence. I utilized this venue for all the interview and group discussions. Before the interviews, to ensure participants were settled and relaxed, I would begin by first having an informal conversation with them and talk about myself and some of my own challenges as a woman, so that they could get to know me and each other in the process. I began telling the participants a little about my life and I mentioned that I was a former learner at this school and presently an educator at a primary school. The revelation that I was a teacher seemed in some way to unsettle some of the participants. I imagine that they were a little wary and concerned that I would share their stories with other teachers. I reassured them that all they spoke about in the interviews and focus groups would be in the utmost of confidentiality. Some participants were nevertheless reluctant to speak. At the beginning of each interview I refreshed their memories a little about what had been discussed before and that the information discussed in these interviews would be held completely confidential by the researcher.

After conducting the individual interviews I asked the girls whether they would be willingly to be part of a focus group discussion and the girls were chosen on the basis of availability and also their willingness to attend after school. My focus group discussions included of six of participants, and the focus groups lasted for approximately 40 minutes each. All participants showed up for these sessions; after the sessions I used to take a snack and cool drink for them to thank them for their time. The focus groups were lively, interactive and informative. From my experience of conducting individual and focus group discussions I personally felt that focus group discussions worked better as participants were more eager to share, and encouraged each other to speak openly rather than in the individual interviews. The focus group discussions were able to draw out more rich and informative data than the individual interviews; the participants were much more spontaneous in the focus group discussion. I observed their spontaneity from the manner in which they spoke, their articulations were less hesitant and they were able to dispute each others' responses. The process of generating data was a rapid process here as well, as some of the questions asked in the individual interview overlapped with the focus group discussions. During the second focus group discussion the girls were even more settled and acquainted with the researcher, and it was during this session that they showed interest in my age. To the participants I looked too young to be 'writing book'. In fact they were convinced that I was younger than I said I was which was probably due to most participants being way taller than I was.

Despite the focus group discussions being advantageous in this study, and eliciting rich detailed data, some of the disadvantages that the focus group had in this study were that certain participants dominated the discussion and as a result the other participants were then reluctant to participant or had minimal input in the discussion. Considering how African girls' voices have been silenced, the use of both individual interviews and focus group discussions has given the participants an opportunity to express their perceptions and understandings of their sexualities.

Having data that would not sufficiently address my critical questions, and after conducting four focus groups interviews, I returned to the research site in January 2013 to collect more rich data. I added four more group discussions to my data collection process. With the permission of the

research participants all data collection sessions were audio recorded on a dictaphone and thereafter transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were transcribed verbatim as this method does not distort the data collected and it reflects participants' true reflections and utterances. The direct phrases of participants were noted. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 539) suggest that using verbatim data keeps the flavour of the original data and that direct conversations are direct and rich in detail. Furthermore Cohen et al. (2011, p. 539) add that verbatim data ensures that the researcher stays faithful to the exact words used by the participant. In addition Cohen et al. (2011, p. 537) suggest that making use of transcripts ensures the accuracy of the interview process. Each participant in this study was given a pseudonym and these are reflected in the transcriptions. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 537) state that whilst verbatim recorded data may provide you with accurate data it omits the non-verbal aspects of the interview, hence hesitations, silences, pauses, tone of voice and body language were observed during the process of the interview and recorded in the transcription. Including this in the transcripts enabled the researcher to yield dense, thick descriptions of accounts (Cohen et al., 2011). However preparing and transcribing the transcripts was a time consuming task.

Once transcripts were done, transcripts were returned to participants to read and to validate that their utterances had been correctly represented. In making certain that that the study was constructed on the basis of validity, internal and external validity were taken into consideration. Bailey (2007, pp. 180-181) emphasises that in qualitative research validity serves as a key evaluative criterion; internal validity refers to the correspondence between what is reported and the social phenomena under study. I thus have included recent literature and research studies that have been conducted nationally and internationally in the literature review chapter and these in detail discuss the phenomena of sexuality. External validity, as stated by Cohen et al. (2011, p. 186), refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population, cases, settings, times or situations. Hence, to ensure the validity and reliability of data collected, as suggested by Cohen et al., 2011, p. 195) I used triangulation. I compared and contrasted the focus group discussions and individual interviews. Welman et al. (2005, p. 143) argue that participants' responses are not always true reflections, thus, when one uses triangulation it assists in explaining complex human behaviours from more than one standpoint. In the next sub-section I discuss the ethical considerations adhered to in conducting and completing this study.

### ***3.5.5 Ethical considerations***

Adhering to ethics when carrying research is of utmost salience. Welman (2005, p. 181) advises that the principles underlying research ethics are universal and concern issues of honesty and respect for the rights of individuals. Similarly Cohen et al. (2011, p. 542) states that, given that qualitative data analysis frequently concerns individual cases, personal and private matters, it raises the question of identifiability, confidentiality and privacy of individuals. Bearing in mind the sensitive nature of this study, numerous aspects regarding research ethics had to be followed and adhered to. Following the protocol measures that the University of KwaZulu-Natal stipulates, ethical approval from University of KwaZulu-Natal Executive Committee of the Ethics Committee and the Department of Education was applied for and was granted, as my study formed part of a broader research project; 16 Turning 17: Young people, gender, race and sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS.

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter all gatekeepers were approached. In addition to the project information statement and the informed consent letter contained in it, the following essential information was stated:

- The role of the school is voluntary.
- Female learners in Grade: 11 and 12 or aged 16-17 would be invited to participate and that permission will be sought from them and also from their parents.
- Only learners who consent and whose parents consent would participate in the project
- All information obtained would be treated in strictest confidence.
- The learners' names would not be used and individual learners would not be identifiable in any reports about the study.
- The school would not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- Participants might withdraw from the study at any time and chose not to answer any questions that they were not comfortable with.
- A report of the findings would be made available to the school.

To ensure that participants and parents of participants gave informed consent, I sent out consent letters that provided detailed information on the subject that was being investigated. This was done to allow both the participant and the parent of the participant a clear indication of the role

expected by the participant, as well a description of the research process. Prior to handing out consent letters to parents, it was explained to the young girls were explained that information obtained from the study would be kept confidential, and that their role in this study should be purely voluntary, the school name or participants' names would not be revealed in any part of this study. Parental consent was essential in this study because these participants were considered minors; hence parental consent required that all participants in this study were granted informed consent from either a parent or guardian.

At the outset of all interviews and focus group discussions conducted participants were reminded that all information shared would be totally anonymous and kept confidential, as well as the request that participants keep any personal information shared during the data collection process amongst them and not to share with others outside of the sessions. However two participants did attach a copy of their photographs to the profiles I requested from them, and asked if I could include it in my study; being obliged by the anonymity measures of study I returned the photos to participants.

Considering the sensitive nature of the study, at the outset of this study I anticipated the possibility of participants experiencing emotional or psychological trauma. If a participant did relate a narrative that was traumatic to them, as a researcher I was not equipped to counsel her, hence I planned to refer the participant to the school's counsellor if need be. I recall during the sixth individual interview I conducted, that the participant disclosed to me that she had been a rape victim about two months ago. Considering the agreement of confidentiality I had with the participant I could not breach this agreement, hence was compelled to consult with the participant and draw the participant's attention to the benefit of counselling as well as the detrimental effects of not seeking assistance. Being a novice researcher, I acted purely on instinct despite having a plan in mind, thus I comforted the participant with a hug. After the participant disclosed the details to me about the incident, I did inform her that I will speak to the school counsellor about the incident but only if she allowed me to do so. The participant gave me permission to speak to the counsellor as soon as possible as she was nervous to speak to any of the educators at school, fearing that the word might spread and that she was pregnant and needed help desperately. It is only after the participant's consent that I informed the school counsellor. I

met with the school counsellor after the interview, and explained to her the situation the participant is in. The school counsellor was thankful and promised she would assist the participant in the best way forward. During my next visit at the research site, the school counsellor informed me the (raped) participant is undergoing counselling sessions with her. In addition the participant was not happy to report the case, as she felt it had no footing, since the people that had raped her were in another province and she was more interested in getting help for the abortion she wanted. Later in 2012, during another visit, the counsellor informed me the participant had not been to school for about a month and when trying to contact the parents, contact information was incorrect. During my visit in 2013, I met the participant and I became knowledgeable of the fact that she had aborted the baby, and was still content with not reporting the incident of rape. In the next sub-section I discuss the techniques used to analyse the data collected.

### ***3.5.6 Data analysis***

Qualitative data analysis, as stated by Cohen et al. (2011, p. 537), involves organizing, accounting for and explaining data. In this study the audio tapes were transcribed verbatim into textual data. Transcripts were being read and re-read several times, ensuring that the researcher is familiar with the data collected. In this study a narrative discourse analysis approach was utilised to analyse data. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 581) state that discourse analysis looks for meanings and themes in texts, in addition it is strongly interpretivist, with meanings constructed through observations and language. Discourse analysis, as Cohen et al. (2011, p. 581) suggests, is rooted in a social constructivist paradigm in which behaviours and their meanings are socially situated and socially interpreted. Likewise transcripts were analysed and data was arranged thematically for data analysis and interpretation. To group similar data I had highlighted transcripts with specific colours and thereafter had cut out each text and pasted the data on a theme chart. Each chart had a theme with the pasted texts with the vertical side of the chart for notes, discussing the text. Whenever I needed to refer to the participants' texts or themes the charts were an easy tool to identify information from and work with. In addition this system of arranging data made

analysis and interpretation uncomplicated, logical and manageable considering the high volume of data used in this study. Some of the categories that emerged from the data collected were:

- African culture and sexuality
- Young people, who is having sex and why?
- [Un]safe sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS
- Heterosexual relationships: A matter of intelligence, physical appearance and class
- African girls and same sex relationships
- Sugar daddy ... Dating an older man means I can get what I want!
- Virginity, sexual purity and Christian beliefs
- Sexual violence: Talking about rape and pregnancy
- Parents NOT talking about sex makes you want to do it more

The social constructionist theoretical framework was used as a lens to analyse data collected. In the next sub-section I discuss the limitations of this study.

### ***3.5.7 Limitations of the study***

One of the limitations I anticipated at the initial stage of my study was that I am employed on a full time basis and this meant my having to take time of work to conduct fieldwork. To address this limitation I intended to work after school hours. My school day ended 14:30 pm thus I had to obtain permission from my principal to leave school once my learners have left at 14:00, to be at the research site at 14:15 to conduct my fieldwork. On some occasions my principal would allow me to leave earlier and I was able to arrange my interview times accordingly.

As a novice researcher it was my first attempt in interviewing a large group of individuals. During the beginning stages of data collection during the research process I realized that the data collected was insufficient. Hence I had return early in January 2013 to collect more data. This

affected the process of data analysis and interpretation as it slowed down the progress of this study; nevertheless with the limited data I had available I began the data analysis process.

The issue of validity and trustworthiness in my findings was affected by the aspect of the power relations between the participant and me. Considering the fact that they are learners and I am an educator, the power differentials inhibited some girls to some extent from talking openly. As a result I found myself working through this by showing these young women that I am genuinely interested in their stories. This allowed them to dictate the nature and the pace of the discussions and interviews, allowing them some control of the research process.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has reported the entire process on which this study is grounded. It discussed the research design and methodology utilized to fulfil the needs of the study. In doing so the sample, research site, ethical considerations, data collection and limitations were addressed. The next chapter collectively analyses data through a social constructionist perspective and presents the findings this study has formed. My analysis and interpretation of data are discussed in conjunction with a presentation of many academics' research conducted in the fields of young women and sexuality. My experience as a novice researcher researching sexuality and sexual risk amongst African girls was an enriching and educational process.



## Chapter 4: Data analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapters, this study investigates how a group of young African girls aged 16 to 17 construct their sexual identities. The participants used in this study belong to the Xhosa and Zulu culture, hence I will use Black/African interchangeably when referring people of Xhosa and Zulu origin in South Africa. This chapter presents the data collected and analysed using qualitative research methods. It presents the findings that the study yielded through semi-structured in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions. The discussion is based on these ten girls' articulations and responses derived during the focus groups and interviews. The data presented below has been analysed using the social constructionist perspective, facilitating understanding around how these young African girls construct themselves and others as sexual subjects and how social processes and actions feed their understandings and their engagement in sexual risk. In addition, this theory acknowledges that the young women in this study are not simply passive recipients of male domination but they also actively construct themselves and are agents who negotiate and navigate their contexts. Taking into account that this study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm, the findings indicated below are non-statistical in nature and are accounts of personal constructs and perspectives around the concept of sexuality (Bailey, 2007).

Below I provide brief biographical information on the ten participants whose verbatim responses I use for analysis and discussion. The information below was shared during individual interviews; the order of the biographical information has no specific relevance. The biographical information shared below indicates the diverse contexts and backgrounds participants live in.

- 1. Thandi is 17 years old and is in Grade 11. She is a Christian girl from the Zulu culture. She is currently in a relationship with a boy from school; she has been with this boy for four months. Thandi lives with her mother, younger brother and sister. Thandi's dad passed away and her mother is a part time domestic worker; Thandi's family survives mainly on support grants that they receive from the Government. Thandi hopes to become*

*a civil engineer or TV model one day. Thandi's role model is her mum, she aspires to be like her as being a single parent her mother works very hard to provide and ensure they are all happy.*

- 2. Cindy is 17 years old and is in Grade 11. She is a Jehovah's Witness follower. She is in a long distance relationship with a boy from Pietermaritzburg who is 19 years old. Their relationship is about a month old. Cindy lives with her aunt because her mother is not a Jehovah's Witness. Cindy's mother is a nurse by profession; Cindy's dad has passed away. She has a 13 year old brother and 4 year old sister. Cindy hopes to study BComm. Accounting after she completes school.*
- 3. Precious is 17 years old and is in Grade 10; she is repeating the grade. Precious is two months pregnant, she conceived when she was gang raped about three months ago. Precious is a Christian girl from the Xhosa culture. She lives with her mother and three younger sisters. Precious's mother is a domestic worker, and she recently found out who her dad is. Precious is in relationship with a 17 year old boy from school. Precious aspires to become a social worker one day as she believes she can help girls that have been raped and prevent girls from getting raped. She would like to advise girls, because she knows how hard it is to live in fear and get over those memories. Her role model is God, she firmly believes that God is one person that doesn't judge you and accepts you for who you are no matter what.*
- 4. Aphiwe is 17 years old and is in Grade 11. She is a Jehovah's Witness follower from the Xhosa culture. She is single and has not dated boys before. She firmly believes in preserving her virginity for her husband only. Aphiwe rents with a roommate in the nearby community in a hostel. Her parents are divorced and both live in Margate. Aphiwe's mother is an educator by profession and her father is a police officer, he is going to remarry soon. Aphiwe would like to study law one day as she believes many families out there suffer and have little support when parents get divorced. She has one sibling; he is studying to become an engineer at the University of Cape Town. Her role model is her mother; she admires her mother's ability in picking up and carrying on with her life despite her dad's betrayal.*

5. *Khetiwe is 17 years old and is in Grade 11; she is from the Zulu culture and follows Christianity. Khetiwe lives in a nearby township with her dad, step mother and younger brother and sister. Her parents are separated; she lives with her dad as he has custody over her siblings and herself. He is self-employed and runs a cell phone store, her mum works for a pharmaceutical company. Khetiwe has declared that she is homosexual but is not currently in a relationship. She aspires to become a social worker as she enjoys working with kids.*
6. *Nelisiwe is 16 years old and is in Grade 11, she is a Christian girl from the Zulu culture. She had recently broken up with a boy she dated for four years. Nelisiwe lives with her aunt and two cousins. Nelisiwe's mother is a nurse by profession and works away from home. Nelisiwe's ambition is to become a forensic investigator, as her father died under mysterious circumstances during the Apartheid era. Her role model is her mother; she admires her mother's perseverance and resilient nature despite the hard life she has, especially meeting the monthly household expenses.*
7. *Ayanda is a 17 year old Christian girl from the Xhosa culture. She is single at the moment and lives with her mother, elder brother and sister, niece and cousin. Ayanda has never dated boys before. Her parents are divorced, her mother is a home executive and her dad is a school principal in the Eastern Cape. He is remarried. Ayanda hopes to study medicine one day and her role model is her mother. She admires her mother's hardworking and strong nature as a woman, and the manner in which she carries out both parental roles in their family.*
8. *Nontobeko is 17 years old and is in Grade 11. She is a Christian. She has been in a relationship with a 19 year old boy from outside school for about a year now. She lives with her mother, father, two younger sisters and one younger brother. Her dad works as a shoe manufacturer and her mother is a manager at a retail store. She aspires to become a marine biologist.*
9. *Refiloe is 16 years old and is in Grade 10, she is a Christian girl from the Zulu culture. She is in a relationship with a 20 year old boy from outside school. She lives with both her parents; her dad is a construction worker and her mother a domestic worker. She*

*hopes to become a gynaecologist as she finds childbirth fascinating. Both her parents are her role models as they have encouraged good qualities in her and made her a strong individual.*

*10. Amahle is a 17 year old girl and is in Grade 11. She is a Christian. Amahle ended her relationship with a 17 year old boy from school about three months ago. She is currently single. She lives with her grandmother and two older brothers. Her family survives mainly on her grandmother's pension, as her brother is a part time mechanic. Her mother passed away when she was a year and six months old. Her dad has showed up recently in her life but makes no contribution for her survival or welfare. Amahle dreams of becoming a pilot but is not sure that will prosper due to the financial constraints at home.*

Themes below were formed thematically from the individual interviews and focus groups discussions conducted. In accordance with the ethical requirements of this study, pseudonyms are utilised to protect the identity of the participants and research site. The following themes emerged after in depth engagement with the data collected:

- African culture and sexuality
- Young people, who is having sex and why?
- [Un]safe sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS
- Heterosexual relationships: A matter of intelligence, physical appearance and class
- African girls and same sex relationships
- Sugar daddy ... Dating an older man means I can get what I want!
- Virginity, sexual purity and Christian beliefs
- Sexual violence: Talking about rape and pregnancy
- Parents NOT talking about sex makes you want to do it more

## 4.2 African culture and sexuality

The participants' attitudes reflect the mind sets from distant tradition and cultural practices. Despite its having a minimal effect on their life styles, traditional culture still to a certain extent influences the perceptions and behaviours in some of the participants' lives. From my observation I was able to gauge that this culture is not very influential in their lives and it has little no relevance in some girls' lives. From the discussions conducted through the data collection process I took notice of that these girls weren't very knowledgeable about aspects related to traditional culture. However it's through the focus group discussions that we also understand how culture is understood, perceived and enacted. The two different ethnic groups namely Zulu and Xhosa each have different patriarchal norms that the participants either conform or reject. During a focus group discussion participants were asked what they learnt from the African culture about men/boys and women/girls. Their responses follow:

*Aphiwe: I know with the Xhosa culture, Xhosa culture circumcises men, when a guy reaches a certain age they go up to the mountains and that's where he becomes a man.*

*Nontobeko: Well now days families don't really follow the culture thing, it's just more diverse now. Like in my family we have no culture.*

*Khetiwe: We also learn that women should be housewives, only men should work. It's like they still in that Apartheid thing.*

*Nelisiwe: Women must be the housewife doing all the work, have the kids and if like the man wants another wife it means he can go ahead or if your husband dies the brother has to take you over and care for you.*

The extracts above demonstrate the ambivalence around traditional culture. It demonstrates that culture is dynamic and that resistance around certain aspects, especially gender roles are changing. However, there is also an accommodation; Khetiwe associates female subordination and gender roles with Apartheid rather than with culture. Nelisiwe's response relates how traditional culture sets out the gender roles of men and women as well as the patriarchal structure

of African families, for instance as an African woman if your husband passes on, the cultural expectation is the widow becomes her husband's brother's responsibility.

*Aphiwe: In the African culture girls are supposed to remain a virgin, girls have to do virginity testing.*

*Cindy: Aaagh that testing it's sis!*

*Nelisiwe: I'm scared of the testing, not the test part but what if the king likes me and then you can't say no. It's gone be like I'm gone have to have sex with this old man now (big eyes.) I'm gone have to have his children, leave school, and be a housewife. But ok, I know the king's wives have money and stuff but I don't think it's all that enjoyable. Also if my mother had to ask me to go for a virginity testing, that's when I think she can't trust me.*

The extract above highlights the relative powerlessness that some girls experience when having to choose their own partners. Nelisiwe's response, 'if the king likes me and then you can't say no' displays the inability some girls experience in saying 'no' and in resisting cultural practices that encourage male domination and patriarchal norms.

Nelisiwe's above view on virginity testing puts it in a negative light and the manner in which Nelisiwe perceives virginity testing highlights the lack of trust between parent and child. Nelisiwe does not perceive this cultural practice as a measure to ensure sexual purity.

Aphiwe is a part of the Xhosa culture and mentions the aspect of virginity testing, her peers reply with a negative response. Cindy's response displays her lack of acceptance for this traditional practice. This displays how girls' attitudes have been negatively directed against certain cultural practices. Whilst Cindy might disregard virginity testing, Nelisiwe's response indicates the perceptions girls have towards virginity testing. Nelisiwe was not afraid of the process but was also concerned of the possibilities it could have on her future.

*Cindy: I think these traditions died away about 25 years ago, lots of people don't do them anymore.*

*Aphiwe: For us Xhosa people culture is still there. My brother went to the mountains in winter and got circumcised.*

*Nontobeko: Don't Xhosa girls have to cut a piece of their ear off when they are sixteen years old?*

*Aphiwe: Yes I heard about that but they also cut the VJAYJAY (vagina).*

*Nontobeko: Your little bean or something?*

*Aphiwe: It's your genital; it's by your vjayjay. Come on guys you know what I'm talking about. Well they say they do that so when you get married you will be hyper active for your man.*

*Nontobeko: That is just PAIN!*

From Aphiwe's response it is clear that there are some young people adhering and following traditional practices whilst young people like Cindy feel that such practices are non-existent. From the discussion above it is also evident that a lack of knowledge existed around the certain aspects around testing and puberty with the Xhosa culture.

*Aphiwe: Virginity testing is a respected ritual, you can't be 'with' guys and go get tested.*

*Thandi: I have been for virginity testing; they (grannies) put you down on your back. They put a pillow under your bums and open your legs and look for a 'white thing'.*

*Nelisiwe: They call it an eye; it is that thing that makes you all happy (laughing).*

*Thandi: They look in the vagina for the white thing and if the white thing is there then you are ok! You are a virgin! I only went once and something happened to me there, after that I told my mum NO, I can't go there again.*

*Nelisiwe: In some cultures girls must do it (testing), but in my family we never do it. My mum will be like never, she doesn't like all that stuff.*

*Aphiwe: Even when you have your periods, they (grannies) tell you take a cold bath and they check.*

From the discussion above it is evident that some girls acknowledge virginity testing, however they are gradually starting to resist cultural practices due to the empowerment women experience presently. However, Leclerc-Madlala (2001, p. 535) states that many rural women, the most marginalized of South Africa's population, see virginity testing as the *only* way to re-instil what

they view as the lost cultural values of chastity before marriage, modesty, self-respect and pride. For them, imbuing girls with these lost values represents the surest way to repair the frayed moral fabric of society that has led to the ever increasing problems of teenage pregnancies, STIs, and HIV/AIDS (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001).

To add to this Hallman (2005, p. 44) elaborates that in African settings, a male having multiple partners is accepted by both genders. In addition Nyawose (2011, p. 43) states that young women viewed culture as influential on their risky sexual behaviours. When participants were asked about their views on African culture's tolerance of men having more than one wife, they responded:

*Refiloe: No definitely I will not allow my husband to have another wife. By him having many wives he can contract sexually transmitted diseases and even AIDS and that can be passed to me, I wouldn't want that!*

*Ayanda: Having two or more wives is not right. If that happens I will ask for a divorce, I will stand my ground. I want to be the only one not him making a fool out of me!*

*Cindy: Firstly I think the African culture sucks! Take our President for example; he will be standing there talking about having one partner! It's so stupid because he is not even setting a good example himself. If my husband wants another wife then it's a divorce, if I'm not good enough for him and he feels he can handle another wife and she's better then he can go ahead, I'm not gone put up with all that!*

The above discussion relates the dynamic changes young women are experiencing in defining their sexuality. The argument strongly suggests young women are developing a strong resistance against polygamous practices and are developing an assertive nature and argument as to the reasons why polygamous partnerships are deemed wrong. Likewise, the data extracted displays the control young women are exercising and developing over their sexuality and the sexual agency that is permeating through their resistance and ability to question polygamy. It is also significant how young women like Cindy are able to interpret and analyse the double standards the African culture puts forward. She highlights an important example, that of our President and his polygamous marriages. Cindy's response indicates that young women are becoming critical



and reflective in their thinking and judgment about polygamy. Zeitzen (2010) questions how a modern president can practise polygamy, as polygamy is deemed archaic and patriarchy. Zeitzen (2010) further adds that Zuma's defends polygamy as 'his culture', for Zuma practising polygamy marks him clearly as a Zulu and connects him to pre-colonial African traditions, giving him an identity that could be lost in a globalised, Westernized blur.

*Nelisiwe: Now days some men do have more than one but I also think it's not compulsory for men to have more than one. I don't think it's safe, for me if my husband has to have another wife I will be very jealous, I will forever be thinking about what he does with her, if he is having sex with her, he is using protection, how many others does he have etc. I would never want to share a guy, but if I do find out my guy is cheating on me or wants another wife I will ask for a divorce. Even though our culture says the man must make decisions and tell the wives what to do, I will speak out.*

Nelisiwe's response indicates that young women are moving away from being viewed as docile victims of male polygamy and are beginning to question the safety of cultural practices in terms of contracting and spreading sexually transmitted infections and HIV. The extract above indicates that young women are prepared to question cultural and traditional practices in light of their health and safety. Nelisiwe's response indeed puts forward the liberated voices young African women are developing as well as the emotional issues that surface in women such as jealousy.

*Nontobeko: If my husband does that to me I'll do the same back to him!*

*Thandi: My dad has many wives, and he stays with them and not my mum. I don't think that's good, because we live now without a dad. If my husband does that I will divorce him.*

*Aphiwe: I'm absolutely against men having more than one wife. In a relationship it's all about commitment so why one should be gone or left out? In fact my dad is gone remarry and I feel awful because we once were a good family. Now there will be another person and I don't even know that other person (step mom) he is going to marry. I feel like I am gone have to love her like I do to my mother and that's going to be hard. I feel that now my dad's gone neglect us. Once a lady remarries in our culture her kids are seen as they are part of an outside marriage.*

The above discussion demonstrates how the African culture operates and it shows the oppressive nature of the culture and how it operates to keep women submissive as well the double standards it creates, whereby it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife. It is significant to note that culture reinforces the power men have, particularly in the African culture. Participants Aphiwe and Thandi's disapproval of polygamous marriage stems from the experiences they have had and the impact it has had on their family life.

African women have been and still are viewed as passive, docile victims of male sexual power. Despite this, studies have shown that there are women who resist such power over them and are taking control and exercising their human rights and taking control of their sexualities (Jewkes & Morrell, 2011; Bhana, 2011; Reddy and Dunne, 2007). In addition Bhana and Pattman (2011, p. 6) emphasize that a minority of young women are able to recognise a coercive sexual environment and exercise agency, thus not all young women are victims of male sexual power and certainly young women are beginning to build resistance against male power. In addition gender equality has created spaces for women to be aware of the oppressive nature of certain cultural practices and may choose to reject them even if only through what they say. The study acknowledges that while some may express these sentiments, it is not necessarily what happens. Resisting cultural ways of doing things is not easy.

#### **4.3 Young people, who is having sex and why?**

The South African National HIV Survey (2008, pp. 1-5) and Setswe et al. (2010) concur that the age at which an individual becomes sexually active has relative importance as it puts emphasis on the age at which the individual is at risk to contracting the infection. The study by Ramadugu et al. (2011, p. 52) reports some of the reasons young people indulge in sexual intercourse. The findings of this study (Ramadugu et al., 2011) are that these include curiosity, being forced into it, and a way of having fun. The study by Pettifor et al. (2009, p. 84) indicates that the mean age at sexual debut was 16.4 years for males and 16.8 years for females. Some young men and young women said they had had sex for the first time at age 14 or younger.

During the data collection process as mentioned earlier only three participants stated they were sexually active. Most participants in this study often made reference to their friends or people they knew, when it came to talking and sharing about aspects on sex. Many participants were able to share that their circle of friends are sexually active. Participants reported the experiences and practices of their friends or people they knew of to contribute to this study. Ramadugu et al. (2011, p. 54) adds that friends are the main source of information on matters related to sex among young boys and girls.

Of the three sexually active participants, all had experienced their sexual debut recently, at the time of the data collection process. This means that their sexual debut took place in adolescence. Whilst the others participants shared they were not sexually active, however they spoke of friends who had become sexually active during their adolescence phase. Of the three participants that were sexually active, two shared that having sex with their partners was by mutual consent; however the other participant disclosed that she was gang raped. The sexually active participants shed light on their experiences.

Nelisiwe started dating from primary school from being in Grade 7, back then she was 13 years old. Nelisiwe believes that sex is when two people show each other exactly how much they love each other. It is something that makes you feel good.

*Researcher: Are you and your boyfriend intimate?*

*Nelisiwe: Yes we are up close and personal (laughing).*

*Researcher: What are some of the things you do that's up close and personal?*

*Nelisiwe: Kissing, hugging, touching and feeling each other, like everywhere. A guy that I dated for four years, he broke my virginity, late last year.*

*Researcher: How did you feel?*

*Nelisiwe: I don't know but I was like on cloud 11 I think! Hmmm I enjoyed it! (laughing)*

*Researcher: Who initiated sex in your relationship?*

*Nelisiwe: Most times he would start but sometimes I did especially when I got used to it.*

*Researcher: Did you have to think about having sex at first?*

*Nelisiwe: Yes we both did, we planned it and it felt right. I didn't bother about my age or anything at that time. We did (had sex) at his house and he bought the condoms (laughing)*

Nelisiwe's experiences of sexual intercourse indicate that young women are negotiating the timing of sexual activities and experiencing pleasurable sexual intercourse. Young people are considering protection and making wise choices.

Thandi also started dating in primary school but had more serious relationships since she has been at high school. Thandi shared that she had sex with a boy that she dated for about four months. This took place last year in January. Thandi said that she was friends with this guy and started developing feelings for him and vice versa. Thandi's first sexual engagement with this guy took place at his house and she shared that they used condoms as a form of protection. When asked what was her experience of her sexual engagement she replied:

*Thandi: (laughing) It made me happy, I enjoyed it.*

*Researcher: Who initiated sex in your relationship?*

*Thandi: It just happened we didn't plan and my guy he said we should do this.*

*Researcher: Were you happy with this decision?*

*Thandi: Yes I was happy, I just said yes.*

Thandi's experience of sexual intercourse indicates that in her situation she was to a certain extent coerced into having sex. Her response 'I just said yes', implies that she did not negotiate the conditions on which she had sex. This indicates that some young women are not able to resist men's power and control. Thandi's inability to question her boyfriend's appeal could also relate to her not being in a position to state her curiosity around having sex or the need to have fun.

#### **4.4 [Un]safe sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS**

When the issue of [un]safe sexual practices was discussed, all the participants were knowledgeable of protection and were able to relate the reasons why protection should be used.

This indicates that these young girls are aware of sexual risk and the consequences of engaging in unprotected sex. The South African National HIV Survey (2008, pp. 1-5) reports that despite condoms being readily available in South Africa to young women and men, there has been a low and inconsistent use or sometimes non-use of the product. In comparison, in this study participants associated protection mainly with condoms, as when the aspect of protection was spoken about condoms was a common form of protection mentioned. However participants did report other forms of protection as well, such as contraceptive pills and injections. The findings below also indicate that although these girls are aware of protection, their perceptions of what safe sex means differs.

*Nontobeko: Protection means going and getting tested with your boyfriend and then having sex.*

*Ayanda: Means 'no skin to skin'!*

*Refiloe: Protection means using condoms when having sex or birth control pills.*

Whilst participants' perceptions of what protection is differ, participants were conscious of the need for protection when engaging in sexual activities. Groes-Green (2009, p. 235) elaborates in a study conducted in Mozambique that by using condoms, life is protected and that you have something to live for.

*Refiloe: Protection prevents pregnancy*

*Cindy: Looking at the amount of babies we have and so many people can afford them, it prevents pregnancy, HIV and STIs.*

*Nelisiwe: We use protection so it doesn't mess up our future, let's say you use a condom but condoms are not 100% and you can still get pregnant. If you use contraceptive pills you might not get pregnant but you can get the diseases. Using protection is not only about not getting pregnant, it's your whole life here we talking about. What are the chances of even having a normal baby if you get HIV?*

*Aphiwe: Most people know the facts about disease and but just ignore it and some even believe that as long as they not pregnant everything is cool!*

Some of the participants demonstrate a relatively sophisticated and deep understanding of the consequences of using either safe sex method; the contraceptive pill or condom. Nelisiwe's explanation of using protection highlights the fact that most participants related not using a condom non condom use to contracting diseases and pregnancy only whilst her explanation raises the concern of the possible detrimental effects on one's life. The need to use methods to both avoid pregnancy and limit the transmission of STIs is articulated above and this highlights the fact that young women are aware of the possible dangers of engaging in unsafe sex practices.

During a focus group discussion participants discussed condom use. This discussion brought forward the participants' insights into using condoms. In many interview sessions condoms were referred or spoken about mainly in terms of protection. Participants below share the significance condoms have in their lives.

*Cindy: I think that thing (condom) seems more than that, it has saved a lot of lives.*

*Nontobeko: Well it made of rubber; it does help in most situations. Like when you both don't want a baby or unwanted pregnancy. It helps like if you want pleasure but not wanting STIs. In that way you get the pleasure and don't get any diseases.*

*Cindy: Is it possible to wear condoms for both people?*

*Nelisiwe: Yes, I think it is but you do get hurt when you both are wearing condoms at the same time.*

From Cindy and Nontobeko's responses it is evident that young people value condom use, in that it does not only act as a barrier to contracting infections and unwanted pregnancies but in some instances when you want sex (which is pleasurable) then using a condom is a small price to pay. Furthermore, in the above extract the curiosity and concern some participants had towards the use of a condom are evident; this curiosity indicates the participants' heightened concern of protection for both partners, ultimately considering the need of taking responsibility when engaging in sexual activities.

*Aphiwe: My friend got pregnant while using a condom, her boyfriend had a condom on. She said the guy put the condom on at the end and put it only at the opening of the penis.*

From the extract above in some instances individuals might be misinformed of the procedure required when using a condom; hence this leads to unwanted pregnancy. Similarly this stresses the need of safe practices together with being knowledgeable about contraception, hence when a couple or two young people decide to engage in sexual activity, responsibility and accountability work collectively especially when both young people run the risk of infection and when the proper precautionary measures are not adhered to (The South African National HIV Survey, 2008). In this study the young girls shared that the boys should be responsible for providing the protection.

The girls are of the view that girls (females) should take responsibility for their sexual activities and be responsible for their own wellbeing. While this is expressed, there are girls who find it uncomfortable and inappropriate for girls to use condoms. They refer to the decision to carry a condom by themselves and to use the protection or to face the possibility of becoming infected.

*Nontobeko: I think for your own safety, you (girl) should go buy your own condom.*

*Precious: But I find that awkward for a girl to do, a guy must do that.*

*Nelisiwe: Yeah me, that's kinda stupid.*

*Cindy: I think it's cute for girls and we all should carry condoms with us. Because at least then you won't have HIV, you rather carry a condom then have a disease.*

*Nelisiwe: I know with my cousins they date the 'A' class guys, guys that are rich and have lots of money. So these guys buy the condoms or protection. These guys go to private and big schools so they have money all the time. The guy must definitely buy the condom (laughing) cause I'm not gone waste my money on him. If we are having sex then sorry he must buy, it's his responsibility to go get the protection.*

*Researcher: Why should he be responsible for protection only?*

*Nelisiwe: Because he has too! He is the guy! I don't get allowances or extra money to buy things like protection and besides I can't go tell my mum I need money to get condoms and pills. She will be like hell no! So he must do it, if he wants sex! Also if you're a guy and don't want to use or buy the condoms, at least care and think about the girl like give her money to buy the condoms or pills for herself to protect herself and avoid pregnancy.*

*Aphiwe: Sometimes it's not about buying the pills not to get pregnant; it's about using protection to stay away from the disease. Because when you use protection (condoms) you can prevent the pregnancy and disease. Would you rather live nine months of hell than the rest of your life knowing you gone die and once you have AIDS, what's the chance of you ever having a normal baby or family thereafter?*

It's evident from the dialogue above that the participants in this study were able to convey the importance of protection and the advantages it brings in one's sexual life. It is also apparent that despite the girls being knowledgeable of the use of protection and its advantageous nature, girls in this study argue whose responsibility it should be to provide the protection when having sex. Nontobeko and Cindy strongly felt that girls should protect themselves and take responsibility for providing protection, and not be reliant on the boys to provide the protection. This highlights that young women are taking control over the conditions under which sexual engagement occurs and that young women wanting to carrying 'a condom' indicates that young women are considering the transmission of diseases. However some participants in this study expressed that boys should be responsible for providing protection. From some of the other responses participants related regarding who is responsible for carrying the condom, it is apparent that these girls did not feel a sense of responsibility to protect themselves against diseases or pregnancy. From the diverse responses mentioned above it is evident that these girls communicate specific gender expectations, for example: it's the boy's responsibility to provide protection or the boy should provide the condom because of financial reasons. This implies that there are some participants who use gender as a reason to justify who should provide protection used during sexual intercourse, giving boys a more prominent and dominant role in the relationship; simultaneously it indicates how some girls tolerate and endorse subordination.



#### **4.5 Heterosexual relationships: A matter of intelligence, physical appearance and class**

The girls in this study related to intelligence, physical appearance and class as central aspects they look for in their partners. The study by Pettifor, MacPhail, Anderson and Maman (2012, p. 480) demonstrates how amongst black African women relationship expectations are changing. The study portrays financial support as an important expectation of relationships; in contrast Pettifor et al. (2012) also mention that if love exists in the relationship, then financial stability will follow. The associations and construction of love in the study by Bhana and Pattman (2011, p. 6) highlight how young women and men associate money with love, and presents evidence that that people that have economic resources are seen as attractive.

*Cindy: I'm sorry it's not about the personality! Cause it's not like you gonna get married or something! I'm a gold digger! (Someone materialistic, who prefers partners who are rich, have money at all times.) I want to go out every weekend; money for me equals happiness'! I dated this one guy for seven months and it worked because he was loaded [lots of money in his wallet,] I also dated two guys from this school and it didn't work because they were broke!*

*Nontobeko: For me it's all about the looks and the brains! If you don't have the brains then ok I'll look at your swag and personality! But if you don't have either (swag or personality) then you just don't qualify. For me it's about wanting the money but I got to admit I like the gifts and surprises, it's like wow! But there also some guys you want to go out with just for people to see, just for a trophy by your side.*

*Refiloe: People say looks don't count, but for me I can't date an ugly guy, he has to be cute, tall, model like.*

Whilst physical appearance and class took precedence over personality, personality was essential in some cases. Apart from the boys being good looking and being financially sound some participants felt personality and character were much more important considerations. Firmin (2011, p. 36) argues that young women are attracted to the strength, power and domination of young men, while in addition physical attraction was vital, whilst personality did not seem of

importance. Firmin (2011, p. 36) further elaborates that this type of perception reproduces gender norms, as young women conform to that which is socially acceptable.

*Khetiwe: Has to be intelligent and knows what he wants, I don't care about the outside (physical appearance) when the heart is good everything is fine, he has to be skilled and educated.*

*Nelisiwe: I wouldn't go for looks because looks are just a bonus; it's the person at heart that matters. A good hearted person, who treats me well and doesn't control me or my life, is what I look for. Also a guy that appreciates you and calls you his girl in front of people. A boy that does not have you as a toy and lastly doesn't take you for granted.*

*Ayanda: For me I would look for honest, faithful, caring person. Someone who respects me and my body, and who treats me right.*

*Amahle: Someone who doesn't cheat and lie. A person who is loyal, trustworthy and loving. Someone who can love me without being told how to!*

While some girls view physical features as insignificant, there are those who look at qualities such as respect, appreciation, honesty and trust. These are invaluable to some girls who evidently place much value on being treated in a respectful manner. From the discussion above it is apparent that participants in this study, as Luke (2003, p. 74) reports, appear to have a high degree of control over partnership formation. In addition the discussion puts forward that some participants have the power to control and set out qualities they seek from boys and relationships. The discussion simultaneously illuminates the transitions of African girlhood. Ntombela and Mashiya (2009, p. 95) add that these changes are able to come through the different existing socio-cultural contexts and that these socio-cultural contexts feed mobility. Ntombela and Mashiya (2009, p. 95) further add that the current generation of young women have access to numerous technologies such as the internet, mobile phones and TV channels.

#### **4.6 African girls and same-sex relationships**

Muholi (2011, p. 117) states that despite formal constitutional protections against discrimination based on a person's gender and sexual orientation, black lesbian women are still refused entry

into the nation's most public spaces and are punished for their same-sex desires and relationships. The lived reality and experiences of lesbian women in South Africa includes physical assault, sexual violence, murder, stalking, and intimidation and silenced voices (Muholi, 2011). These experiences are noted as painful, disempowering and delegitimizing and seen as unjustifiable acts (Muholi, 2011).

In both the focus group and individual interviews the participants spoke quite openly and freely about homosexuality and it was established that one of the girls was homosexual. Some participants expressed their attraction to both boys and girls but revealed that they had not engaged in any homosexual activity. The extracts below indicate participants' views of young African girls who were attracted to girls, with some participants constructing themselves in ways that resist heteronormative sexuality.

*Cindy: I have been to a single sex school and dating a girl is just one of those things, it's like SO WHAT! It's like a norm to do. Lesbians that should be friends date and kiss. As time goes by you get used to it.*

*Khetiwe: I actually like both boys and girls, I feel attracted to both, just have feelings for both.*

*Nelisiwe: I also liked a girl once but it changed I don't know how. I liked her swag (style) and the way she spoke to me.*

Even though the participants were able to share that some felt attracted to girls and some to girls and boys, they did not relate being in homosexual relationships. Whilst some of participants may have acknowledged and accepted homosexuality in their school setting other participants felt offended by same-sex attractions. The data extract below highlights that there are variations in individuals' responses, while some are less tolerant to homosexuality than others. Hence participants below explain why they felt challenged by the phenomenon.

*Aphiwe: I have been approached by a girl once, I felt so offended I wanted to hit her. I was like what are you thinking? Look at me I'm all glamorous, I have earrings on!*

*Researcher: Why did you find her offensive?*

*Aphiwe: Cause it makes me feels like I'm a tom boy or something. I just don't feel like a real woman when I'm asked by lesbians to date them or like them back.*

*Nontobeko: Guys (boys) are like sis when it comes to lesbians! Most guys don't like it at all, they start name calling them, and also in a mixed school it's not tolerated by both boys and girls.*

*Aphiwe: Most boys are intimidated by lesbians, because they will not have girls to go after!*

*Nelisiwe: It's jealousy as well, guys (boys) hate not to have girls that running after them! But also girls have this mentality that if we date girls, we can prevent getting pregnant. So dating girls is an advantage!*

Participants also stated that not only girls are homophobic but boys are as well. According to Mutua (2011, p. 457), in the dominant social view heterosexuality is a privileged sexuality, as this type of sexual orientation is perceived as natural and normal. Real womanhood is defined by heterosexuality in this instance and from the extracts above, it is evident that participants who disapproved of same-sex relationships shared the belief that that 'real' women do not engage in same-sex relationships. In addition Aphiwe felt offended when approached by lesbians and related that this type of behaviour questioned her womanhood. Whilst this study demonstrates how lesbians are berated and humiliated in some contexts, it conveys also the view that same-sex relationships evoke a sense of emasculation within boys, whereby boys experience a sense of loss in losing girls to other girls. The extracts above simultaneously suggest that same-sex relationships also reduce the risk of pregnancy. Apart from homosexuality bringing into question one's womanhood, Msibi (2012, p. 527) states that homophobic behaviour in South African school settings is due to the tension that exists between culture/religion and homosexuality, especially in townships schools where certain elements of identity become compulsory, with deviance heavily punished.

Ogana (2006, p. 75) highlights a significant aspect related to sexuality; homosexuality is still perceived as 'unAfrican' and stigmatized as a European invasion into African culture, where many African homosexuals are despised, derided and ostracized. In addition, Ogana (2006, p. 76) states that homosexuals often keep their sexuality a secret, due to the stigmatisation. On the other hand this study has demonstrated that some of these young women openly speak about same-sex relationships and are happy to disclose their sexual orientation. Ogana (2006, p. 76)

further elaborates that heteronormativity obscures issues of sexual orientation and does not take cognisance of homosexuals and bisexuals in understanding reproductive health in the era of HIV/AIDS. Bhana and Anderson (2013, p. 557) argue that same-sex desires are perceived as pleasurable investments and are highly regulated despite the surveillance and unrewarding perception it receives socially.

#### **4.7 Sugar daddy... Dating an older man means I can get what I want!**

Muula (2008) argues that the racial segregation and discrimination experienced during apartheid has left Black women especially uneducated and thus women use transactional sex to escape poverty and unemployment. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) state that black African women, generally without the means to be economically independent, have often been dependent on black African men and this, together with cultural practices of respect, has promoted obedience and passivity as hallmarks of African femininity. Firmin (2011, p. 45) asserts that young women express the need to date older men on the basis of the monetary gain; likewise, some participants shared their experiences and the experiences of others, such as friends and colleagues that date older men.

According to Leclerc-Madlala (2003, p. 20) attracting and maintaining a relationship with one or several older, employed men was considered to be an act of self-assertion, cleverness, and an important contribution to young women's self-perception as modern, sexually liberated women. During the data collection process and having informal conversations with the participants, I became aware of the material aspects these girls hoped for. It became apparent that even though the participants are attending an urban high school, the socio-economic contexts the participants come from differ. Their lifestyles and class context differentiate.

*Cindy: When you start dating older people you start looking different, every week you have a new hairstyle, clothing, latest shoes, latest everything. When you date older guys it's like you more respected and you become famous.*

From the extract above it is evident that young women are able to exercise their sexual agency. In addition when young girls enter a relationship with an older man, it is not necessarily a victim-perpetrator situation and that in some instances girls go into relationships of such a nature willingly, and for the benefits such relationships have.

Aphiwe rents a room in a hostel and shares a room with an 18 old year old. This 18 year old girl has multiple concurrent partners (about four) and also has one steady boyfriend whom she has now had for a long while, who is 30 years old. Aphiwe's roommate has a three year old baby that lives with her family. Aphiwe shares a little about this the life of this girl, who is also 18.

*Aphiwe: My roommate oooh! That one, she is active! She is this materialistic kinda girl who loves clothes, money and new hairstyles. She says she doesn't go for school boys anymore, because they are boring and can't support her needs enough. When she goes out to parties and stuff she comes back and tells me about it like how nice it is to have sex, how it feels, she makes it sound very exciting. She told me about these 'morning after pills' she uses for pregnancy. Every time she goes with one of her boyfriends in the mornings she will take these pills. She is very wild, she even showed me videos of her boyfriends and her having sex.*

Aphiwe stated that her roommate has encouraged her several times to date boys and have sex. Aphiwe firmly believes in 'saving herself for someone special', like her future husband. Whilst her roommate believes that marriage is a waste of time, she adds 'looks how many people are getting divorced'. Aphiwe's roommate persuades her to live and enjoy life, not to stay at home cook and waste her time on books. Aphiwe's above response displays the peer pressure young women face and the influence peers can have on each other. Aphiwe's roommate's behaviour also indicates that peers rely on each other for information on sex and that peer pressure can be powerful, however Aphiwe is a goal orientated person and firmly believes 'books before boys, because boys bring you babies!'

*Aphiwe: I try to help her and ask her sometimes who is gonna support and you baby one day, cause she is in matric now but parties all the time. I even told her don't expect your parents to look after you child forever. She was like NO! I have boyfriends they will do that for me. At first*

*when she found out she was pregnant she pointed out the wrong father of the baby, she had slept with a guy at a party, a guy from school then the following day she slept with another guy and unfortunately unprotected sex with both partners. It was embarrassing cause when the child was born people used to look at the baby's face and say ahhh! It looks like this guy or it looks like that guy!*

It is evident from the extract above that peer pressure is not only experienced in a negative form, Aphiwe has tried to positively influence her roommate to avoid unsafe sex practices and to try to move away from such practices that could spoil her reputation and life in the near future. In addition the data displayed above indicates that some girls experience sex as pleasurable and hence encourage peers to engage in sexual activities; furthermore it is evident that girls are engaging in sexual activities not simply to ensure the man or men in their lives are sexually satisfied, but for their own pleasure as well (Allen, 2003).

The extract below shows us that whilst some young girls might date older men for materialistic gains and sex, some do find genuine love in older men. Shabane (2011, p. 69) states that young women revealed that by dating young men of the same age material gain is relatively low in the sense that young men can afford these young women stuff such as a movie ticket; whereas dating men that are older in age allows them to attain stuff such as food, money and clothing. However the young women in Shabane's (2011) study acknowledged that material gain was only possible through return of sexual favours.

*Nontobeko: I know most girls date older men for materialistic things but I know of a girl that is dating a guy that is way older than her and they both are really in love, they always going out and doing things together and sometimes not all older men have money.*

*Nelisiwe: Exactly! Lots of girls they go for older men because they are more satisfying in bed than the younger ones, it's 'cause they have bigger genitals.*

Dating older men, as the data has shown, is not simply a relationship based on material gain. It can be a relationship of love or sexual experience or even sexual gratification. Shefer and Strebel (2012, p. 60) highlight that studies often reflect older men involved in transactional sex as the

‘baddy’, with low morals and exploiting young women. The extracts below illustrate that in some instances young women sometimes do grow affectionate and end up falling in love with older men. Bhana (2011, p. 5) contends that the ‘sugar daddy’ phenomenon thrives in poor-resource contexts and the facilitation here of relationships operates on the basis of exchange. Participants in this study were aware of the ‘sugar daddy phenomenon’ and elaborated below on the phenomenon.

*Nontobeko: We see a lot of them around! I always look at this one poster in town and for me it says; just keep away from men and cars because they mess up your life.*

*Aphiwe: I feel it’s like selling your bodies*

*Nontobeko: Sometimes it’s a cultural thing for girls to marry older men.*

*Nelisiwe: Yes that has happened to me, my dad’s granny wanted me to visit her so she could arrange someone for me and my mum disagreed with that. My mum told if she wants to me to meet anyone she should bring them to visit us. But that guy was almost fit to be my dad.*

Jewkes and Wood (1997, p. 42) found that relationships were perceived as contractual, whereby young girls are expected to have sex in exchange for material gain. Casale et al. (2011, p. 303) present findings in their study that women engage in transactional sex in order to support their families; both men and women agree that transactional sex could sometimes be the only strategy for acquiring material goods in an impoverished setting. Extracts below highlight some of the experiences of participants and participant’s peers in a context of poverty, and demonstrate how poverty has driven the need of having older men in their lives.

*Aphiwe: I think poverty also makes girls do it! I have seen it where I lived before a girl used to date an older guy just so that at breaks she could have a pie, Coke or Lays chips and she did this so she could be part of the rich girls’ group.*

*Nelisiwe: I think I can relate to that, I remember a time at home we had many problems and felt like that the only way I could get away from this all is to date an older guy, not cause I wanted to have sex with him but so he could give me money and I could feel secure and get money to help myself and family. To tell the honest truth I did start falling in love with him. Late last year I*



*found out something about my mother (HIV positive) so that made me realize life is so short and how hard life is going to be.*

Nelisiwe's experience indicates how young women who experience poverty and are trapped by their circumstances are not only vulnerable but are placed under pressure to alleviate the problem. Nelisiwe's situation did not only alleviate her household problem but heightened her awareness of the possibilities of dating an older man, especially dating a sugar daddy. In addition Nelisiwe's mother being infected has given her first-hand experience of the possible consequences if she continues the relationship.

*Aphiwe: The girl I spoke about earlier, she eventually fell pregnant and after she told the sugar daddy, he ran away. He told her he has a family and children and can't afford another child; he told her she must just abort the baby.*

The extract above displays that young women that get into relationships with sugar daddies are not only at risk of contracting infections and unwanted pregnancies but run the risk of also being abandoned, in the sense that young women who have been impregnated by sugar daddies and are left alone to oversee the burden of an unwanted pregnancy.

In a recent study Bhana (2011, p. 3) describes how male teachers are interested in young women at school and relates this to how male teachers who come from a higher economic status are able to provide young women who are deprived with gifts and money. Aphiwe relates an experience of an older man trying to entice her into having a relationship with him. She recalls him being her educator at the previous high school she attended.

*Aphiwe: At my previous school a male teacher had asked me out. He would ask me to stay back after school. He was always paid attention to my work in class; he wanted me to sit in the front of the class. I remember once when he marked my book he put a note in there for me asking for my cell phone number. He tried many times to get my number.*

*Researcher: How did you react to the way he behaved?*

*Aphiwe: I didn't entertain his ways but I did stay back the once after school because I didn't want to be disrespectful, he did the same thing and asked me out. I told him I can't be his girlfriend.*

*Researcher: Did you tell anybody about him at school?*

*Aphiwe: Yes I did, my friends only not the other teachers and my mum too. My friends used to tell me to go see him, they thought he was cute and smart and would tell me what's wrong with you? Go you would get higher marks and stuff. I was like NO! NO! I'm not that kinda girl.*

*Researcher: How did this make you feel?*

*Aphiwe: I changed my place in class, I moved to the back of the class, I was very uncomfortable. He always looked at me in my face. He was my Social Science teacher, and after that I started hating Social Science, cause like in projects and stuff other girls would get 15 out of 20 and I would get total.*

*Researcher: Did he offer you anything if you dated him?*

*Aphiwe: Yes he did (big eyes) this one day I left my lunch at home, then during break like when the teachers walk around. He came up to me and said why you are not eating, he insisted he will buy me a pie, I was no thanks!*

From the above discussion it is evident that male teachers, in return for marks, lure girls into relationships with them. Madlala (2013) reports that a total of 497 teachers (101 from Kwa Zulu–Natal) were reported to the South African Council for Educators during its 2012/13 financial year, for a range of offences including sexual abuse. The South African Council for Educators provides a code of professional ethics for South African educators to adhere to. According to the South African Council for Educators Act, 2000 educators should:

- a) Refrain from any form of sexual relationship with learners at any school,
- b) NOT abuse the position he or she holds for financial, political or personal gain;

#### **4.8 Virginity, sexual purity and Christian beliefs**

All the participants in this study stated that they belonged to the Christian faith. Most of the participants were aware of the practices and felt that it is righteous that one should save

themselves for marriage. Of the ten participants, three stated they were sexually active, one having being raped. Participants in this study stated that they come from strong and devoted Christian homes. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 16) state that religion and religious beliefs are the foundations of community life in a majority of societies; in addition religion prescribes ethical guidelines for many aspects of daily life and also helps adherents to navigate the belief systems and norms surrounding sexuality. They further add (Banerjee & Sharma, 2007, p. 16) that the majority of religiously tailored belief systems condemn premarital sex, contraception including condom use, and homosexuality.

Ayanda shared during the individual interview that she is a born again Christian. Ayanda stated that she has never dated boys before. When asked about how she felt about having sex before marriage she responded,

*Ayanda: NO! Never. (Shook her head) THE BIBLE, it says a woman should have sex after she marries. It's wrong and it's a sin.*

*Amahle believes that sex before marriage it like committing adultery. I think you should wait cause the person you having sex might not be there tomorrow. But if you married at least you know the person will be there afterwards if something thing happens.*

*Khetiwe: Sex before marriage is being selfish, I think one should wait for the right time like when you married and settled down and know what you want from life.*

*Aphiwe: If you are not married there are lots of chances for the guy to leave you, and to me SEX is something very special, you can't have it with anyone.*

From the data extracts above it is clear that some participants' beliefs about premarital sex were drawn strongly from the teachings of the Bible. It is apparent that these participant's intents of preserving themselves are rooted in the moralities and values of Christianity and its teachings. In addition girls in this study respected the notion of remaining a virgin and indeed valued and expressed the importance of maintaining their virginity. Anderson (2013, p. 6) argues that young girls in her study were able to regulate their sexualities and pursue sexual purity by subscribing to Christian values and teachings derived from the Bible. She goes further to add (Anderson, 2013, p. 6) that the residents of the community where her study was conducted have turned to

religion and religious devotion to counter and regulate sexual behaviours and reign in inappropriate behaviours. Young girls in the study (Anderson, 2013, p. 6) control their sexualities from the values, knowledge and teachings Christianity suggests.

Firmin (2011, p. 40) claims young women in her study firmly believe that reserving one's reputation and dignity as a young woman means that you should hold onto your virginity for as long as you can. Firmin (2011, pp. 54-55) argues that young women are not simply victims of the gender order any longer. Furthermore, young women are challenging the gender order in society by, for example, attempting to take control of sexual decision making, by changing the pre-existing power dynamics (Firmin, 2011).

Participants who were sexually active had a somewhat different perspective.

*Nelisiwe: According to my beliefs and culture no it's not right but for me it's like if I feel like I am ready, it feels right and if I trust the guy then yes I would!*

*Precious: No it's not right because most times the guy doesn't love you he just uses you, but sometimes you also get to experience stuff before you are married.*

Although Thandi had lost her virginity she stated that having sex before marriage is wrong, she stated 'it can destroy your future and also not a being a virgin is not a benefit.'

The responses above indicate that even though Nelisiwe belongs to the Christian faith, her decision to engage in premarital sex is based on desire and trust, and she relies on her feelings and emotions to direct her choices and decisions rather than religious teachings. Thandi on the other hand, who adheres to the teachings of the Bible, expresses a sense of regret in losing her virginity before marriage. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 16) note that some religions also advocate a submissive role for women, foster gender inequality in marital relations, and promote women's ignorance in sexual matters as a symbol of purity. During a focus group discussion the following discussion centred on the aspect of premarital sex:

*Nontobeko: Not to question GOD but I think that if you have this very strong feeling for this certain person and you know it's love and feel it's right for you guys to engage in a such a thing to do then do it. Cause GOD might not see that gold or silver ring on your hand but I think if you repent it will be ok! Because if you meant to be nothing will happen!*

*Aphiwe: Not all of us grew up in Christian homes; some of us became Christians as we grew up so we learn certain things on our own. Therefore I think we should pray to GOD and ask for forgiveness and be patient and wait for the right time.*

*Nontobeko: You have to pray for the right person! But what happens when you save yourself only to find out the guy you married has been sleeping around and it will be like he has so much experience, more than I do.*

The discussion above reveals the significance marriage has in the girls' lives. The importance of marriage symbolizes the commitment some girls desire. In addition whilst some participants were deeply rooted in their belief that premarital sex is a sin, others who were so not deeply connected felt that premarital sex can be forgiven even though it is not righteous. Nontobeko on the other hand raised the concern of being experienced when going into a marriage, her concern was being equally experienced for her partner.

*Nelisiwe: I don't think that only girls should save themselves because I believe that there are very few guys out there that are virgins.*

*Aphiwe: I think by saving yourself, the guy will respect you more; he will appreciate your virginity.*

*Thandi: What happens if you don't get married?*

*Aphiwe: If you pray and believe in GOD, you will get married.*

*Thandi: I believe in GOD but I don't think everyone is meant for marriage*

*Nontobeko: I think marriage is too much! And getting hurt when you married is more painful, getting cheated on when you married is sore!*

*Aphiwe: But marriage is there to help you, it is supposed to remind you of your vows and commitment, make you more secure. Also like I'm a Christian I'm not gonna go for someone who is not a Christian. I will look for someone who has morals and values.*

From the above responses it is apparent that virginity is prized and highly valued by Aphiwe, where she related that by preserving your virginity, your worth as girls is more esteemed. In contrast to Aphiwe's response, Nelisiwe believed that there is no need for girls to preserve their virginity as she believes that most boys are not virgins. Moral righteousness was a strong factor in the choice of life partner for Aphiwe. Whilst Nelisiwe's response reveals a stereotype (girls must remain virgins), Aphiwe's response displays the strong influence religious practices can have on girls' decisions to abstain from early sexual engagement.

#### **4.9 Sexual violence: Talking about rape and pregnancy**

South Africa has a record of 66 196 reported sexual offences that occurred during 2010-2011 (South African Police Services, 2011). Rape was the most common form of social contact crimes; of the 66 196 reported offences, 56 272 were rape related whilst others were categorised as sex work, pornography, public indecency and human trafficking. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 12) state that gender-based violence has become commonplace in almost all societies. Acts of violence greatly increase vulnerability to HIV, especially for women. Precious was a victim of gang rape that took place during the July school holidays, when visiting her grandmother who resides in the Eastern Cape. Precious shared that her being raped broke her virginity. Precious was returning home from the local spaza shop when she was attacked by five unknown boys. Precious did not report the offense and did not share this incident with anyone but her school friends when she returned to school after the holidays.

*Researcher: How are you coping with all of this?*

*Precious: It's very hard (cries). I'm trying I'm really trying (cries). I did go to the counsellor I didn't tell anyone until I missed my periods, then I went to the clinic. They did a pregnancy test and then I found out I'm pregnant.*

*Researcher: Where about did this take place?*

*Precious: I was going home at night from the Spaza Shop, there were boys standing there and they just grabbed me here (points to the neck) put me down and then take off my clothes and then they did what they wanted to do!*

Precious's situation indicates the gender violence experienced in townships and the negative impact it has had on her life.

*Researcher: Have you spoken to anyone close to you about this, perhaps your mum or teacher?*

*Precious: No, I didn't, my mother doesn't know. (cries) My mother is.... (clears her throat) .... (silence) also got HIV (cries) so I didn't tell her to stress her. I couldn't tell my gran, because she just came back from hospital from a stroke. (cries) Here at the clinic they told me if I don't want to keep the baby I must abort it but I must go to a public hospital in Chatsworth.*

The predicament Precious was placed in of being raped and pregnant has silenced her ability to obtain advice, support and help from her family.

*Researcher: Do you know how many months you are?*

*Precious: Yes two months, they even did a HIV test at the clinic but it came negative but they said come back after three months because it might not show now.*

*Researcher: Does your boyfriend know about the rape and pregnancy?*

*Precious: No, he does not know but he tells me that I'm weird and I think he suspects me.*

Precious only told her friends at school about her rape ordeal, because she needed money to go to the hospital and her friends were able to lend her money. Precious did go to the hospital and was told to return after few days for the abortion. Precious spoke of her first sexual engagement as a very painful and sore experience. She remembers how much she bled and screamed for help on the night of her rape. Precious also recalled how she would previously tease and laugh at her friends about having sex. It is evident that young women are vulnerable to sexual violence and exposed to a high risk of contracting HIV. The data extracts represented earlier also indicates that some girls experience little power and control over their lives.

*Precious: Before I used to laugh, now I hide or feel crying when my friends are talking, I feel so guilty!*

From my observation, Precious held herself responsible for the rape, she also shared her decision that she will not have sex before she is married or if she is not ready. It became apparent that the consequences of the rape have influenced her to abstain from sex hereon.

On the other hand the participants who said that they were not sexually active spoke about their friends' or cousins' experiences of sexual engagement. Participants were able to share that their friends are sexually active and when asked why they think their friends are sexually active, participants responded as follows:

*Cindy: My friend she does it to please her boyfriend cause she is dating an older guy. This guy gives her clothing, cell phones and money. For her sex business is glam cause soon she will have a car. She is doing it just to have the goodies.*

*Researcher: What are some the experiences your friends have had?*

*Cindy: Apparently most of them say it is really, really sore. Most of my friends felt bad afterwards like regretted it because when you parents or teachers talk they advise you to find that special person and when you do how do you tell that person you are not a virgin. How will you tell your kids to look up to you when you messed up as a teenager? My friend Nelisiwe wishes that she could have it back (virginity) because she would be a better person. People only realize this all once they grown.*

Cindy stated that when her friends talk about sex she becomes a good listener and pays attention to their sex talk. She also added that when this happens she feels left out and sometimes stupid. Cindy's peers' experiences demonstrate the material gain some young girls are engaging in sexual intercourse for. Her peers also shared that sex was a painful experience and after experiencing sexual intercourse they had regretted it.

*Researcher: Do you know who initiated sex in your friends' relationships?*

*Cindy: Mostly the boys, because all my friends are people like down to earth. They don't talk or won't stand up for themselves. Those boys have power over them and the boys tell them (her friends) if you love me... then let me have sex with you to prove it.*



Cindy's peers' experiences indicate that boys determine and initiate sex in heterosexual relationships. In addition girls are manipulated by boys using the punch line *'if you love me... then let me have sex with you to prove it.'*

*Cindy: I know the Bible says it's wrong, say no to sex before marriage but sometimes I wish I could have sex so I could also talk about it, share my experiences and give tips too.*

*Researcher: Does this not tempt you?*

*Cindy: Yes I have and I did tell my boyfriend, he turned me down saying its wrong, NO!*

Cindy's response indicates that young women are enticed and encouraged by their peers; this sets out a feeling of temptation to feel what sex is like.

Khetiwe shared that a lot of her friends at school are sexually active and they encourage each other to try it out (have sex). Most of her friends believe that having sex with their boyfriends strengthens the love in the relationship. Khetiwe also added that when her friends spoke at school about sex, she asked them questions about having sex.

*Researcher: Why do you think your friends are sexually active?*

*Khetiwe: Peer pressure, just because friends are doing it. Sometimes friends tell you if you can't be like us then you can't be with us in our group.*

*Researcher: Do you not feel pressured?*

*Khetiwe: No, I think it's selfish to have sex before marriage, I believe in waiting for the right time.*

Shabane (2011, p. 73) asserts that the 'absence' of the verbal and physical pressure becomes the real pressure; similarly young women in this study related that not being able to contribute to discussions about sexual matters within your circle of friends encourages one to engage in sexual activities. Nontobeko shared that even though she is not sexually active she is intimate with her boyfriend and do stuff like 'touch each other's asses'. Nontobeko shared that the friends spoke of sex as a 'painful' experiences. When asked about how she feels when her friends talk about sex, she responded:

*Nontobeko: Sometimes I am comfortable, depends which group I am with. I listen most of the times.*

*Researcher: What are some of the reasons young people want to have sex?*

*Nontobeko: to experiment, peer pressure. For boys I think it's about a status, they just want to prove that they can get 'laid' (had sex), it's more like game for guys. It's like when they talk, they almost bet with each other, like ok! See that girl she is the hottest thing around. Guys will actually bet on who will or can get her first or sleep with first. For girls I think it's when the guy puts pressure on them for sex and sometimes it's wanting to know how it feels. Sometimes it's for popularity for boys they want it to be known, like I hit her! It's like a kinda score thing. Guys also want to be cool with other guys, because if you sit with a group of guys they actually laugh at the ones that doesn't have sex. They like you a guy and you not getting any! It's like you seem less of a man if you not getting any!*

Nontobeko's utterances indicate that even though she was not sexually active she was comfortable being around her friends who were sexually active. Nontobeko's peers relate their sense of curiosity as well being pressured by their peers as some of the reasons for being sexually active. Nontobeko's response also points out that boys are engaging in sexual activities as a game and go to the extent of betting which girls they will have sex with. This is a clear indication that engaging in sexual activity is not considered as a serious and important aspect. In addition boys who are not having sex are deemed less of a man, so boys are encouraged to sleep around to prove their manhood. Bell (2012, p. 288) reports that young men experienced peer pressure in the form of verbal encouragement; observing others enjoying being in relationships. In comparison, young women experienced peer pressure in the form of pervasive talk about sexual relationships from adult men or men older in age.

Aphiwe is a strong believer in Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Bible; 'no sex before marriage' is the motto she believes in. Aphiwe shared that she has friends that started having sex in primary school when they were about 12 or 13 years old. Aphiwe said when her friends spoke about sex, she was very open to the topic, and she even contributes to the discussion. She added, 'I do tell them guys there are nothing wrong with sex but there's a perfect time for it.' This

indicates that by her contributing to the discussion she does not exclude herself from the topic just because she doesn't have experience with sex but she uses that as an opportunity to encourage her friends to abstain or rather wait for the right time, which she ultimately believes is after marriage.

She shared the following:

*Researcher: Have they shared their experiences with you?*

*Aphiwe: Yes they did. Because they had the freedom to be out of their houses on weekends, they got to visit their boyfriends and said that they get to spend quality time like that. My friends talk about how they start like kiss first, etc. Some of my friends said that their boyfriends would tell them if you don't do it (have sex) with me, I will go find someone else.*

*Researcher: Do you not feel pressurised?*

*Aphiwe: No I accepted it the way they are and I know myself, I know what I want so I'm not pressurized at all.*

*Researcher: Do you know who initiates sex in your friends' relationships?*

*Aphiwe: It was the guys, because guys are always in control in relationships.*

Whilst peer pressure might be an influential aspect in young people's sexual lives, Shabane (2011, p. 74) states that an element of carelessness exists between young women and men, whereby young people, despite being knowledgeable of aspects such as disease, teen pregnancy, etc., experiment with their bodies. Likewise Aphiwe's responses, as reported above, demonstrates that she was able to resist peer influence and maintain a positive mindset around her belief related to premarital sex. In addition her peers relate that boys are in control of the timing of sex and, as illustrated earlier, boys are initiating sex in heterosexual relationships.

Lebese et al. (2011) have shown in their study that media influence was the main source of information on sexual health. The participants (Lebese et al., 2011) stated that they heavily relied on media for information. However it is noted in this study (Lebese et al., 2011) as well that the media can carry misleading information on sexuality, and it is from here on that myths and

misconceptions of sexuality surface. Likewise Ramadugu et al.'s study (2011, p. 54) reveals that one of the main sources of knowledge on sex among boys and among girls was the media.

*Researcher: What are some of the reasons young people want to have sex?*

*Aphiwe: It's the media especially television. It's like they make it seem like it's a must and its old fashioned if you don't have sex. Some people also just want to experiment and sometimes it's so they are loved more by the other person.*

*Researcher: What are some of the reasons young people want to have sex?*

*Refiloe: It's the media, media plays a huge role. Like you see on T.V, the music videos, you see them touching and stuff and it looks cool. Oh they make it look cool! Like hmmm she so hot, she looks so happy! It makes you want to do it (have sex) also peer pressure, when friends are enjoying it, you sit there and wonder why am I not doing it? Am I really some form of freak or weirdo?*

The extracts above illustrate the media and its influence on young people. It seemingly encourages young people to engage in sexual activities. By the mere fact that media is portraying messages about sexuality openly, it conveys messages of acceptance and approval regarding sexual activity, hence young people viewing such content are motivated to experiment. Ogana (2006, p. 66) adds the findings from a township setting that the label of 'virgin' also has negative connotations for girls and implies that a girl who is still a virgin is considered 'unworthy' of being part of her peer group. Similarly Nyawose (2011, pp. 39-40) adds that young girls engage themselves in sexual risk behaviours for peer acceptance, and to compete with their friends' experiences.

#### **4.10 Parents NOT talking about sex makes you want to do it more**

According to the participants some parents do speak to their children about sex education; however participants disclosed that it was not the easiest of aspects to discuss with parents. Participants added that school and friends were a common and convenient ground where they

were able to interact and learn more about sex education. Most participants relied on talking and sharing experiences about sexual encounters with friends at school. The participants mentioned that sexuality is a sensitive topic to discuss with parents or elders in the family. Morrell et al. (2012, pp. 13-14) argue that fathers have little engagement in the upbringing of the child and a high proportion of households are headed by one adult only, mainly female. Indeed, most participants in this study had very little contact with their fathers and most of them were closely associated with their mothers. Hence support and guidance from a full family unit was not present.

Participants whose parents did educate them about sex education, shared the following:

*Nelisiwe: When I was in Grade 8, I started getting my periods. She (mum) told me to stay away from boys, don't date boys and you can't have sex! What she didn't tell me was the bodily changes I will experience, like the hormones and feelings, etc.*

*Researcher: Are you comfortable talking to your mum?*

*Nelisiwe: NO! (Blocks her face) but she is always lecturing me, cause she not around me all the time, she tells me to be careful, trust the person and protect myself!*

*Nontobeko: Even though there might be that slight bit of awkwardness it does help, when I come home late my dad talks to me cause he knows what guys are like! And even though we might say we are a different generation (we always having that argument) my parents tell me that we were once kids too and we know how the mind plays and works. You see my mum also got pregnant at an early age and so encourages me to know the person I date. Cause she is older and wiser I know what she says has good intentions!*

*Aphiwe: My mother talks to me about sex, but there's a limit (blushing), I try to avoid the details cause she is my mom, I respect her and I know she wants me to be open about sex and understand it.*

*Refiloe: It's too uncomfortable, it also personal. I can't discuss things like that with my mother or father.*

Seven of the participants indicated that their parents did not interact or talk with participants about aspects regarding sex and sexuality. Participants also disclosed that they felt a great deal of

discomfort about engaging in conversations about sexuality with their parents or elders in the family. Many participants also did not reside with their parents; some live with other family members and hence do not have the support and guidance that parents can offer to their offspring. As a result these participants rely on school, teachers and friends at school to derive information about sexuality. Participants also shared that being advised by parents reduces one's curiosity level and prevents one from experimenting and engaging in risky behaviour. Being informed makes you knowledgeable and enables one to make informed choices and decisions.

*Nelisiwe: I think if your parents don't talk to you about these things, you become curious and you'll want to do it more!*

Participants that were at an advantage of having the liberty to talk to parents about aspects of sex education also made mention that school was heavily relied as a source of finding out and learning about aspects of sexuality. Participants also shared that, apart from learning and sharing at school with friends about aspects related to sexuality, educators at school were easy to interact with and engage in discussions about sexuality. I noted that most participants stated that the teaching and learning process of sex education took place from primary school level; participants shared the following:

*Khetiwe: We are all not lucky to have our parents talk to us, and to relationships like yours.*

*Ayanda: Talking to strangers, it's better because they never judge.*

*Cindy: I talk to my Life Orientation teacher, I'm so comfortable with her, and I can talk about everything.*

The desire to be able to talk to parents is clear. Participants related the need for more vital input from parents regarding sexuality. It is also clear that the school environment created a safe and comfortable space for participants to communicate with, with aspects about sexuality. Nyawose (2011, p. 53) reports that schools are seen as the place that has the potential to cascade important information to young people and that can assist in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Nyawose (2011, pp. 51-52) adds that parent-child communication is vital, but that parents often just tell

them not to involve themselves with sex issues but do not tell them why they must not do those things.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This analysis has represented the diverse and contrasting ways in which a group of young African high school girls construct their sexuality. The analysis of this study presents the young girls' perceptions and understandings of sexuality against the backdrop of HIV/AIDS. This study shows how young African girls are moving away from being docile victims of male sexual power, resisting such power over them, taking control, exercising their human rights and taking control of their sexualities. This study offers insight as to how young girls – despite the vulnerability, sexual risk, cultural practices, and gender norms and so on still – are able to navigate their sexualities as well as take a positive step towards creating safe sexual spaces. In addition this study reports the resistance some girls experienced against gender power relations and dynamics, the study highlights the autonomy and negotiation required by girls if they are to reduce the susceptibility to HIV/AIDS and sexual risk. Through this study, it is evident that young African girls are becoming relatively accepting of same-sex desires and relationships, hence are challenging heteronormativity. The findings in this study motivate how religious teachings and devotion can motivate and encourage sexual purity. Furthermore the findings of this study present the perceptions and the reality of the possibility of extreme sexual violence young girls' encounter. Lastly this study depicts the considerable sexual agency young African girls are attaining in their sexual lives and working towards agency in relationships.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This qualitative study investigated how a group of African high school girls attending an urban high school construct their sexual identities and how their particular constructions are related to their engagement in risky sexual behaviours. This study reveals the different ways a group of young African girls give meaning to their sexuality. In addition, the study has illuminated the diverse sexualities that exist in the African contexts. This study has created a platform for these young girls to voice their perceptions, understandings and experiences that influence their sexuality.

This chapter consolidates the main findings this study has produced and synthesizes the arrangement of the study by providing a brief summary of each chapter. Following this the recommendations are made to address the relevant issues.

This dissertation comprised of the following sections:

Chapter 1: Introduction – This section comprised the background to my study, the rationale for my study, the aims and objectives of the study, research site and the key research questions utilized to access data.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework – This section collectively presented local and international research conducted, reported work of various scholars and their findings that are related to gender, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, sexual behaviour and sexual risk, and the vulnerabilities young women and girls face. Broader themes are formed through the burgeoning forms of research information presented in this chapter. Following this the theory of social constructionism was discussed and an elaboration of this theoretical perspective was presented.



Chapter 3: Research design and methodology – This section consisted of the detailed plan and account of how my study was executed and the strategies employed to complete the study. This section discussed how a qualitative study within an interpretivist paradigm was implemented. The data collection process was presented here, indicating the necessary measures and tools adhered to in the data collection process.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and discussion – This section consisted of the findings derived from data collected and a detailed discussion followed from the data collected. An analysis was presented and related to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. Several themes emerged from this study, such as:

- African culture and sexuality
- Young people, who is having sex and why?
- [Un]safe sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS
- Heterosexual relationships: A matter of intelligence, physical appearance and class
- African girls and same sex relationships
- Sugar daddy ... Dating an older man means I can get what I want!
- Virginity, sexual purity and Christian beliefs
- Sexual violence: Talking about rape and pregnancy
- Parents NOT talking about sex makes you want to do it more

Chapter 5: Conclusion – This section consisted of the summary of this dissertation and presented the main findings this study has derived, together with what has been found and learnt from this study. It addressed the limitations experienced during my study and the possible recommendations.

## **5.2 Main findings**

This research study demonstrates the dynamic nature of the African culture in these girls' lives. The attitudes of these African girls reflect the influence modernity and the western way of life

have on their lives, hence their attitudes and mind sets distance them from tradition and traditional cultural practices. Despite this traditional culture having a minimal effect on their lifestyles, culture still to a certain extent influences the perceptions and behaviours in some of the girls' lives. The study in addition highlights the ambivalence around culture and simultaneously demonstrates that culture is dynamic and that modern influences result in resistance. This study also demonstrates how young women are developing a strong resistance against polygamous practices and are developing an assertive nature and argument as to the reasons why polygamous partnerships are deemed wrong. Whilst this study has noted the influence of cultural practices and the manner it reinforces power within men, so that often African women are perceived as passive docile victims of male sexual power, there are women who resist such power over them and are taking control and exercising their human rights and taking control of their sexualities.

This study goes on to reveal that even though cultural practices inhibit some girls' sexuality, there are some young women that are negotiating the timing of sexual activities and experiencing pleasurable sexual intercourse. In addition young people are considering protection when engaging in sexual activities and in some instances making wise choices that prevent them from attaining disease, infections and pregnancy. In this study, out of the ten participants, three were sexually active. Of these three, all were either 16 years or older. Despite only three participants revealing that they were sexually active, all participants were knowledgeable of protection and were able to relate the reasons why protection should be used. Young girls were aware of sexual risk and the consequences of engaging in unprotected sex. The South African National HIV Survey (2008, p. 1-5) reports that despite condoms being readily available in South Africa to young women and men, there has been a low and inconsistent use or sometimes non-use of the product. In comparison, in this study participants associated protection mainly with condoms and when the aspect of protection was spoken about condoms was a common form of protection mentioned. A relatively sophisticated and deep understanding of the consequences of using the safe sex method, the contraceptive pill or condom, was articulated in this study. Statements around protection have drawn attention to the need to avoid infectious diseases and pregnancy. Apart from the need to be cautious and wise when engaging in sexual activities, this study has stressed the need for both partners to be knowledgeable about contraception and protection as

well as clarifying accountability and responsibility when using such measures as condoms for protection.

This study has revealed intelligence, physical appearance and class as central aspects young women in this study aspired for in partners. The study by Pettifor, MacPhail, Anderson and Maman (2012, p. 480) reports how amongst black African women relationship expectations are changing. Similarly, this study displays that people that have economic resources are seen as attractive. In addition Ntombela and Mashiya (2009; p. 95) further add that the current generation of young women have access to numerous technologies such as the internet, mobile phones, TV channels, and that these advances aid the freedom to construct femininity, hence young women develop a sense of assertiveness and become agents of liberation. This highlights processes of transition in African girlhood. This study has emphasised the material aspects these girls hoped for in future or from relationships. Even though the participants are attending an urban high school, the socio-economic contexts the participants' come from differ. Their lifestyles and class context differentiate them. Despite this differentiation, girls in this study, even those that came from a stable socio-economic situation, had desires for material gain.

This study's findings include the perceptions around homosexuality; even though the participants were able to share that some felt attracted to girls and some to girls and boys, they did not report being in homosexual relationships. Whilst some of participants may have acknowledged and accepted homosexuality in their school setting, other participants felt offended by same-sex attraction. Some participants were less tolerant to homosexuality than others and some even felt offended by the concept. Mutua (2011, p. 457) states that in the dominant social view heterosexuality is privileged, as this sexual orientation is perceived as natural and normal. Likewise this study portrays participants' views that real womanhood is defined by heterosexuality and that that real woman do not engage in same-sex relationships. Ogana (2006, p. 75) reports the perception that homosexuality is still perceived as 'unAfrican' and stigmatized as a European invasion into African culture where many African homosexuals are despised, derided and ostracized.

Religion and religious beliefs impacted significantly in the participants' lives and their perceptions around sexuality. Most participants' beliefs about premarital sex were drawn strongly from the teachings of the Bible and these participants' intentions of preserving themselves as virgins are rooted in the moralities and values of Christianity and its teachings. In addition some girls in this study respected the notion of remaining a virgin and indeed valued and expressed the importance of maintaining their virginity. Banerjee and Sharma (2007, p. 16) state that religion and religious beliefs are the foundations of community life in a majority of societies; in addition religion prescribes ethical guidelines for many aspects of daily life and also helps people navigate belief systems and norms surrounding sexuality.

Lastly this research study displays the diverse and unique constructions of sexuality this group of young African girls have. Taking into consideration the high infection rate of HIV/AIDS particularly in South Africa, this study offers significant ways in which young girls are constructing and making meaning of their sexuality. The findings presented in this study include the numerous ways girls are negotiating their sexual identities, as well as being assertive individuals and challenging the gender norms society poses. This study goes on to illustrate the sexual agency young girls are developing, thus giving them an opportunity to create safe sexual spaces and practices in their lives.

### **5.3 Possible recommendations**

The diverse meanings of sexuality and sexual risk we interact with in this study relate to the different circumstances that influence and shape these young girls' perceptions around sexuality and sexual risk. Some of these circumstances are culture and cultural practices, religious beliefs, socio-economic situation, family lifestyles, Western lifestyles and modernity. These circumstances as mentioned above have in some instances encouraged safe sex practices in these young girls' lives and encouraged these young girls to be aware of the possible risks young people face in contracting the HIV virus.

From an educator's point of view, in order to encourage safer sex practices and awareness around sexuality in high schools, I would suggest that the curriculum be structured in a manner that it raises awareness not only in specific study areas such as Life Sciences or Life Orientation but gets learners involved in awareness campaigns and workshops and organizes youth networks within the different grades at school. Such measures would assist young people with the opportunity to interact and learn with their peers about sensitive topics. In addition, considering this would be taking place in a school environment, it would ease the tensions amongst young people and making learning aspects related to sexuality easier. According to Gopaldass (2012, p. 68) religious leaders, respected members of the community and parents should discuss issues around sex and the importance of being safe; this should be done in order to encourage teenagers to practice safe sex, raise greater awareness around HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections and possibly deter them from engaging in risky sex. As Gopaldass (2012) suggests, religious leaders, community members, parents, etc., should discuss methods to disseminate knowledge around sexuality. Persons of such nature and authority in society are seen as positive and act as role models. According to Nyawose (2011, p. 60) educators can develop self-confidence in young girls and educators must encourage young girls to fight for their sexual health.

Self-confidence can be developed in young girls through peer groups and networks formed at school or through community efforts. For example, young girls who are homosexual should be encouraged to form a peer group that could offer each other emotional support and build resistance against others who discriminate against homosexuality. In this way young girls will feel empowered and develop a higher self-esteem. Peer groups set a platform for young girls to voice their opinion and express their feelings about sexuality and aspects related to sexuality. Community efforts could help extend these peer groups' examples: in getting these young motivational speakers or hosting events and functions that showcase other young women who are homosexuals. In addition young girls need to be educated and emancipated around the rights around sexual orientation and gender violence.

Presently young people are taken by technology and its advancement, thus social networks could assist in creating awareness of HIV/AIDS infection, highlighting the importance of safe sexual

practices, and the global or national rate of infection. This would raise awareness and keep young people updated on aspects related to sexual risk. Social networking sites can also be useful since parents sometimes do not reside with their children; such networks might create a space for young people to help other young people who are need of information or require advice. Intervention programmes should be organised at school that inform young people (boys and girls) of the possible consequences of not exercising certain rights. Educators should request assistance from the Department of Education in designing proactive programmes.

Transition and positive changes start from the individual; in this study it is evident that young African girls aged 16-17 have a desire to lead a healthy and safe live, their articulations indicate the need to practice safe sexual practices and reveal the empowerment and sexual agency young African women are developing. These young African girls display the resilience and motivation many young African women desperately are in need of if they are to eradicate the patriarchal and gender barriers women face. This study acknowledges that in the context of HIV/AIDS, young African women and girls are becoming more sexually assertive and developing sexual agency even with the constraints of contexts that are patriarchal and enforce oppressive cultural practices on them.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Ethical clearance certificate

 **UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

17 April 2012

Mr/Ms Nirusha Rugbunthai 206507519  
School of Educational Studies  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSE/0088/08V  
New project title: African Urban High School Girls' constructions of sexuality and sexual risk

Dear Mr/Ms Rugbunthai:

I wish to confirm that your application in connection with the above mentioned project has been approved. **Approval and change of project title**

Any alteration/s to the approved Research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

  
Professor U Bob (Chair) and Dr S Singh (Deputy Chair)

/ps  
cc Supervisor: Professor Lesvie Bhana  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr MN Davids  
cc School Administrator: Ms D Bhengu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Professor Umilla Bob (Chair) and Dr Shanika Singh (Deputy Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag 254001, Durban, 4050, South Africa  
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3587/3596/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 4609 Email: umhnp@ukzn.ac.za / gshenika@ukzn.ac.za / mshunika@ukzn.ac.za  
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Residing Campuses:  Edgewood  Hlward College  Medical School  Mkhamphizburg  Westville



INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Appendix 2: Informed consent-parents and participants (girls)

May 2012

Dear: Parent

Urban high school African girls' constructions of sexuality and sexual risk.

My name is Miss Nirvasha Rugburthial and I am currently studying towards a Masters Degree in Gender Education at the University of KwaZulu – Natal (UKZN). As part of the degree, I am required to complete a research dissertation. My study aims to understand how a group of African high school girls in an urban context give meaning to their sexual identities and how risky sexual behaviours are related to these meanings. In order for the study to be a success, I require your daughter to be of the age bracket sixteen or turning 17 belonging to the African race group to participate in my study.

If you choose to allow your daughter to participate in this research, she will be invited to answer biographical questions, respond to questions in an interview and participate in focus group discussions aimed at sexuality and gain an understanding of the perceptions of sexual risk. The completion of the process will take an approximately one month and will be done during school hours on the school premises.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your daughter and your daughter has the right to withdraw herself at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times and in the analysis of the data and completion of the Urban high school African girls' constructions of sexuality and sexual risk. A summary report of the findings will be made available to the participants.

If you would like any further information or are unclear about anything, please feel free to contact me via e-mail: [nirvasharugburthial@yahoo.com](mailto:nirvasharugburthial@yahoo.com) or telephonically on: 031 7640916/071 682 7277

Your co-operation and your daughters participation is valued and appreciated.

Kind Regards

---

Miss N Rugburthial  
Researcher

---

Dr B Anderson  
Supervisor

I Mr, Mrs, Miss \_\_\_\_\_ parent of \_\_\_\_\_ in Grade: \_\_ hereby give consent/do not give consent for my child/ward to participate in the above mentioned study

Parent Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### School Principal Consent Form

I give consent for you to approach learners in Grade: 11 and 12 or learners aged 16 -17 to participate in the project 16 Turning 17 Young People Gender, Race, Sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS;

(Urban high school girls' constructions of sexuality and sexual risk.)

I have read the Project Information Statement explaining the purpose of the research project and understand that:

- The role of the school is voluntary
- I may decide to withdraw the schools participation at any time without penalty
- Female learners in Grade: 11 and 12 or aged 16-17 will be invited to participate and that permission will be sought from them and also from their parents.
- only learners who consent and whose parents consent will participate in the project
- all information obtained will be treated in strictest confidence
- the learners' names will not be used and individual learners will not be identifiable in any reports about the study.
- the school will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- a report of the findings will be made available to the school.
- I may seek further information on the project from Miss Nirvasha Rugburtial on 031 764 0916/ 071 682 72 77 / [nirvasharugburtial@yahoo.com](mailto:nirvasharugburtial@yahoo.com)

---

Principal

---

Signature

---

Date

### **Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview schedule (focus group interview)**

#### Focus Group Questions.

##### Topic 1: Boyfriends' and Girlfriends'

- a) Describe the ideal boyfriend
- b) Name some of the qualities you look for in a boyfriend?
- c) Describe the ideal girlfriend
- d) Name some of the qualities boys look for in girls?
- e) At what age did some of you have your first boyfriend?

##### Topic 2: Who is having sex?

- a) Do you know of girls in your class/grade/school that are having sex?
- b) How did you become aware of this?
- c) Do you think they are using protection?
- d) Do you think protection is a wise option?
- e) Do girls initiate sex? Discuss

##### Topic 3: Why are young people having sex?

- a) What encourages young people of your age group to engage in sex?
- b) Is peer pressure a reason young people want to engage in sexual activities? Elaborate
- c) Do you know of young people who have sex for money, gifts, and why?
- d) Do you think young people are receiving knowledge and information about sex at home and school? Explain
- e) Should boys make all the decisions regarding sex, example: time, place, use of protection etc?
- f) Name some of the reasons young boys and girls want to have sex at an early age?

##### Topic 4: Perception of Risk

- a) How would you describe a girl that has many boyfriends at once?
- b) How would you describe a boy that has many girlfriends at once?

- c) *'Condoms are just a piece of rubber!'* Comment on this statement.
- d) *'Dating an older man means I can have what I want!'* Comment on this statement.
- e) Do young girls speak of their sexual experiences as pleasurable?
- f) When a young girl is being forced into having sex, how should she handle the situation?

#### Topic 5 : Violence and sexuality

Is your partner violent towards you? Explain

Are you / have you been forced to have sex against your will? Explain.

Have you ever felt manipulated or convinced to have sex

#### Topic 6: Gender and sexuality

Do you know what are sexual risk / risky sexual behavior? Explain

Have you been involved in any risky sexual practices? Do you know anyone who has been?  
Explain

Who in your opinion is more vulnerable/ exposed to sexual risk? Girls or boys? Men or women?  
Why?

#### Topic 7: Class and sexuality

Do you know about sugar daddies? Explain

Are young girls engaging in sexual activities for pleasure and love or status and monetary gain?  
with who? Discuss

Do you believe that you need to preserve yourself for marriage? Discuss

## **Appendix 4: Semi-structured interview schedule (individual interview)**

### Individual Interview Questions.

#### Section: A

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where do you live?
4. With whom do you live with?
5. Are they/ he/she working?
6. In a few sentences' describe your family (life) at home.

#### Section: B

1. What Grade are you in and are you enjoying being in this Grade?
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. Do you enjoy school?
4. What you like about school the most?
5. What do you hope to do study after you complete school?
6. Do you have many friends?
7. Do you have both boys and girls as friends ?
8. If yes, (*describe*) of relationship do you share with these boys?
9. Are there any males teachers that teach at your school, do they teach you?
10. Describe of relationship do you share with these male teachers?

#### Section: C

1. Are you in a relationship with anybody, how old is he?
2. What is your idea of an ideal boyfriend?
3. What is your idea of an ideal girlfriend?
4. When did you first start dating?
5. How did you start dating your boyfriend?
6. Was he your first boyfriend?

7. Is he your only boyfriend? Are you seeing one or more boys now?
8. Do you spend a lot of time together?
9. Where do you spend time together?
10. What are some of the things do you during this time?
11. Do you like spending time alone with your boyfriend and why?
12. Describe the relationship you have with him.
13. How does he treat you? Explain.
14. Are you and boyfriend intimate?
15. Do you or your friends engage in sex?
16. When was the first time?
17. How did you feel?
18. Was it pleasurable?
19. Who initiated sex in your relationship?

Section: D

1. What do you understand by the word sex?
2. How did learn about sex?
3. Do you and your friends ever talk about sex, if so when and where?
4. When your friends talk about sex, how do feel?
5. In your circle of friends, is anybody sexually active?
6. Why do you think these friends of yours are sexually active?
7. Do your friends use protection?
8. Why do you think protection is encouraged?
9. Where do you think your friends get information about sex?
10. Do think it is right to have sex before marriage and why?
11. Describe a faithful boyfriend
12. What are some of the reasons young people want to have sex?
13. Do you think girls your age know the consequences of having unprotected sex?
14. Can you name some of the consequences of having unprotected sex?

15. In the African culture, men having many wives/girlfriends are allowed; do you think this encourages a healthy sex life?
16. If you were dating a boy that had other girlfriends whilst dating you, would leave the relationship or stay with him and why?
17. Do your parents/grandparents/ guardian/s talk to you about sex?
18. If your boyfriend had to ask you to have sex with them, would take the offer instantly or would you think about it first?
19. Condoms are readily available, sometimes given free to the public. Do you think young people use them?
20. In relationships, who do you think makes the decisions about having sex men or women, girls or boys? What do you think the reason is for this?
21. Is sex pleasurable?

## Appendix 5: Turn it in Originality Report

African girls constructions of sexuality and risk by Nirvasha Rugburthial

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